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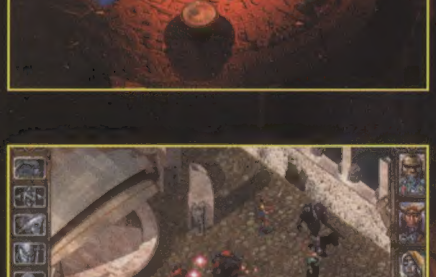

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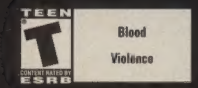

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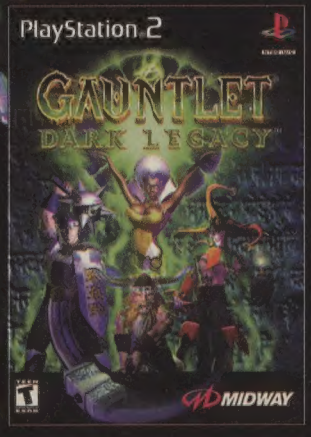

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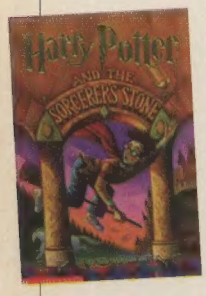
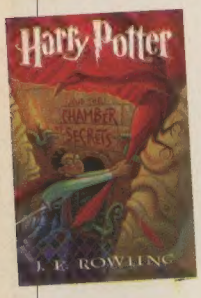
editorial

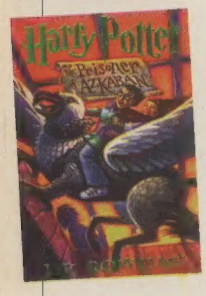
Harry Potter and the Multimillion-Dollar Media Machine.

Once upon a time there was a young woman and a baby living in a dark and depressing city far, far away. This young woman desperately wanted a better life for herself and her child, and to this end she decided to write a Fantasy novel. "Surely," she thought, "I can work on a novel part time in a coffee shop while my little baby sleeps. When I'm done writing it, I can send it to publishers who will instantly see its value, publish it, and I will make lots of money and provide a better life for myself and my darling baby."

To this young woman, those of us with years in the trenches of the publishing industry would say just one thing: "Hah! Everyone with an opposable thumb thinks they can write, and they all think it's really simple, and they all think that if they do manage to sell a book, which hardly ever happens in itself, that they will instantly become rich and famous. Double Hah! What really happens is that the book is printed, shipped, and pulped, all within the course of about nine months. No one ever hears about it, only 3,000 people ever read it, and the author doesn't even earn out her $5,000 advance. Poor, sad, deluded young woman," we would say, "just go get a Real Job and forget about trying to make money as a writer."



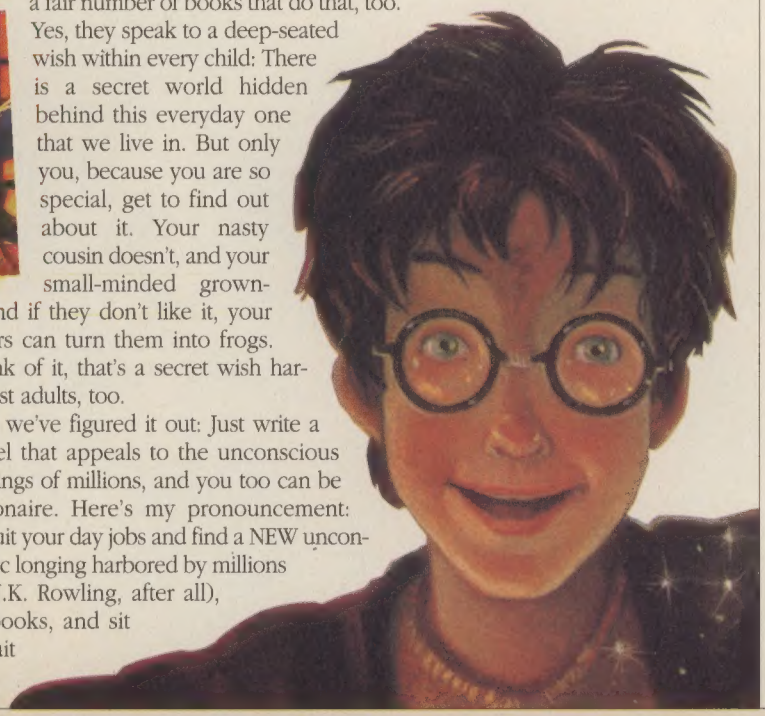




Well, I think we all know how this story ends, and no one I know can decide if this means that everything we know and believe is wrong, or if this is just an example of how the exception proves the rule. Should we now encourage our clients to quit their day jobs, sell their homes, and let their children work in sweatshops because one day they too will become rich and famous? Or should we point out that the Harry Potter phenomenon is just that, a phenomenon—like lightning striking, or winning the lottery, one that can't be predicted, or even explained?

The latter phrase is the telling one: Everyone in publishing is trying to figure out what it is about HP that has made the world change its directional spin and seduced lions into lying down with lambs. Yes, they're very good books—but there are a lot of very good books, some even better than HP. Yes, they appeal to a broad spectrum of readers, but again, there are a fair number of books that do that, too.

Yes, they speak to a deep-seated wish within every child: There is a secret world hidden behind this everyday one that we live in. But only you, because you are so special, get to find out about it. Your nasty cousin doesn't, and your small-minded grown-ups don't, and if they don't like it, your secret powers can turn them into frogs. Come to think of it, that's a secret wish harbored by most adults, too.



So, maybe we've figured it out: Just write a Fantasy novel that appeals to the unconscious psychic longings of millions, and you too can be a multimillionaire. Here's my pronouncement: Everybody quit your day jobs and find a NEW unconscious psychic longing harbored by millions (can't copy J.K. Rowling, after all), write your books, and sit back and wait to collect!

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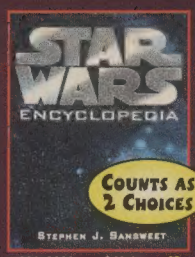

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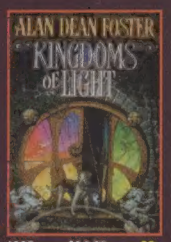

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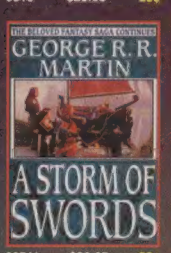

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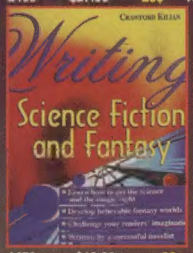

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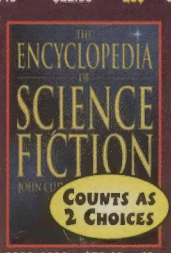

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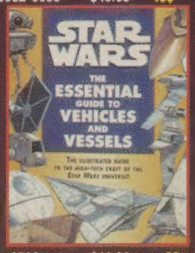

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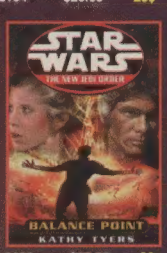

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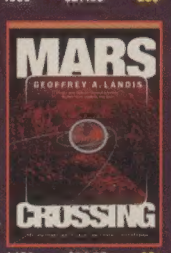

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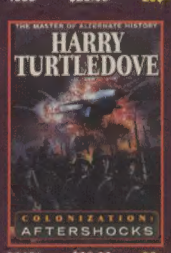

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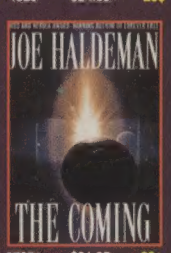

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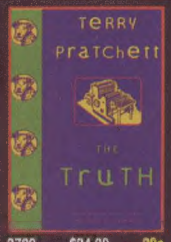

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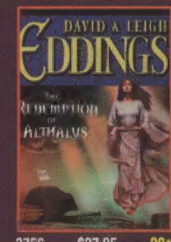

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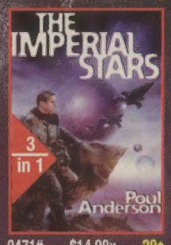

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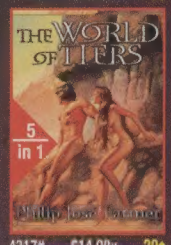

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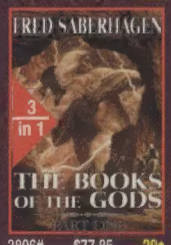

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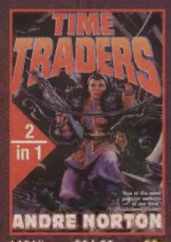

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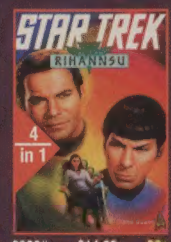

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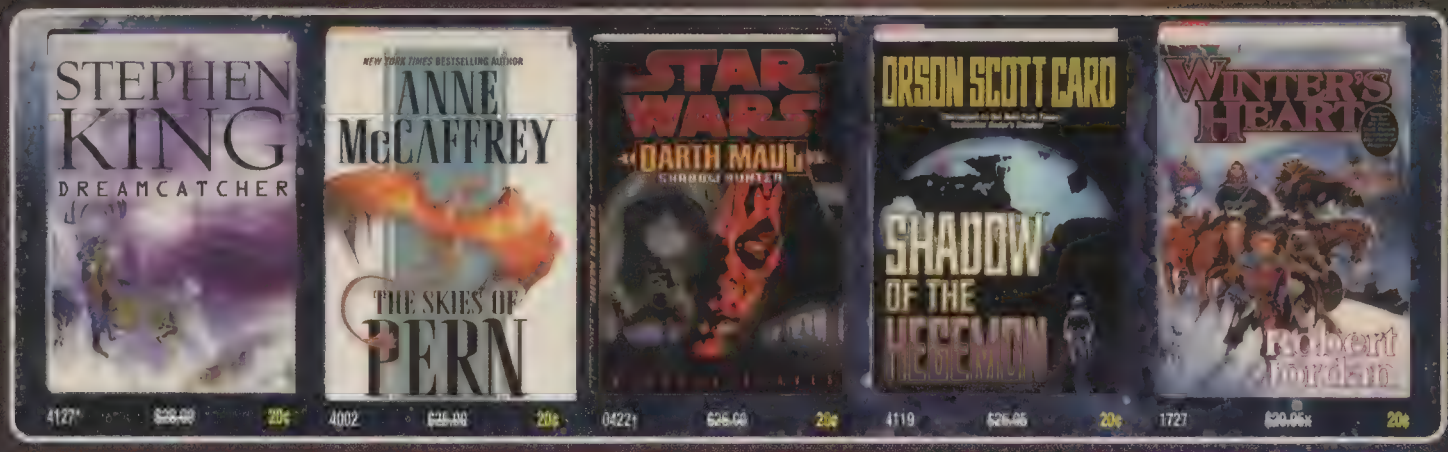

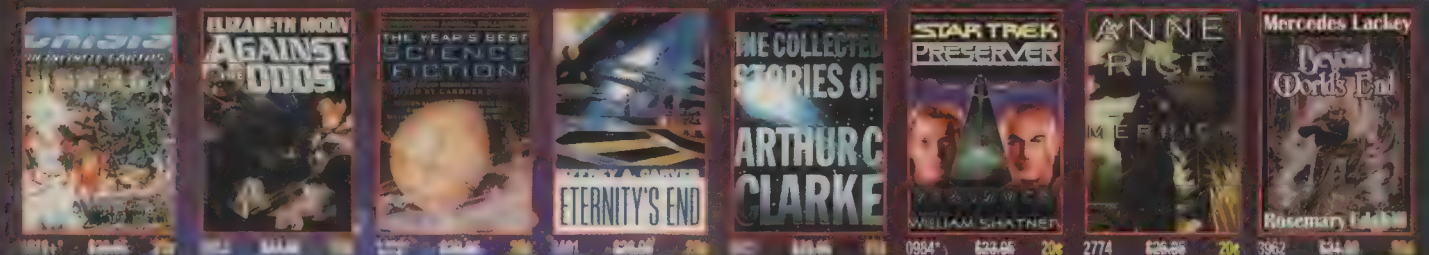

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Dear *Realms of Fantasy,*

Thanks for a great periodical. I often don't leave an issue until it's entirely read from cover to cover. I do have a bit of a problem with an article in the February 2001 issue. Marty Baumann's piece on Stephen King's "Best and Worst" is presumptuous. Mr. Baumann claims movies that are *not* affiliated with King as his worst. He should not tag Stephen King to a movie he didn't have anything to do with as his own. Stephen King didn't write, film, produce, or cameo in *Pet Semetary 2; Children of the Corn 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; The Rage: Carrie 2;* or *Creepshow 2.* I understand it was an opinion piece, but the facts need to be straightened up a bit.

Thanks for your time,
Daevyd

Dear Marty,

Having taught University of California accredited courses in Film Studies for the past 10 years, I enjoyed your article "Bringing Stephen King Novels to the Big Screen Does Not Guarantee Success," with two minor exceptions.

Putting *Storm of the Century* on your list of King's worst (as #2) couldn't have been a bigger mistake. Too long? It was gripping! And the theme of crowd mentality, as well as King's underlying comment about society's willingness to "sell their children," made this outstanding. I don't recall your mentioning the theme. Finally the classic line, "Give me what I want and I'll go away" helped make this a classic for my DVD library collection.

Also, your comparison of the film and mini-series versions of *The Shining* missed on several points. As a writer, I am sure you know that novels and films are different in structure and length. Comparing a novel to a film is like comparing the proverbial apple and orange. Of course, sometimes a single piece of fruit tastes bitter. There is no denying that Jack Nicholson in the Kubrick version [helped make it] a classic "film." Those two names speak for themselves. But as you may know, King never liked the film because it deviated too much from his intentions. He preferred Steven Weber (whom you questioned) because the father character starts out as a regular guy in his novel, whereas Nicholson's character starts out looking and sounding crazy (or in this case, haunted). This also brings me to the book v. film question. Can any film do justice to a book in two hours? Usually not, which is why avid readers have trouble with film versions. But can you do justice to a novel with a six-hour mini-series? Obviously! The mini-series of *The Shining* was a wonderful vehicle for comparing a director's vision (as most films are) to an author's vision (as the mini-series was).

Of course some of King's writings, as you indicated, should never have become celluloid, while others didn't resemble the book in any way, making King remove his name from the project. But that still leaves us with *Misery* and *Stand By Me,* two of King's films used in my courses; *The Green Mile* ... you named the rest.

Respectfully,
Phillip Brugalette

As an aside, Assistant Editor Rebecca McCabe wants to mention that she attended The University of Maine several years after Stephen King. He was the school's most famous and celebrated alumnus. As an English major there, Rebecca was taught by professors who enjoyed pointing out they had "taught" Stephen King. One such professor loved telling the class that King was not *the best writer he had ever had the pleasure of teaching—but* was *"the hardest working writer he had ever seen before or since."*

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Like young Bryan Jones, whose letter was featured in the February issue of *Realms of Fantasy,* I very seldom write letters to the editor. But when I read your response, I had to break tradition. Your comments echoed, almost verbatim, the thoughts boiling in my mind by the end of Mr. Jones's letter! Silly and outdated it may be, but at the end of your editorial remarks, I found myself exclaiming, "YOU GO GIRL!" *The Grapes of Wrath* happens to be one of two books I would choose to be stranded with on a deserted island, the other being Charles deLint's *Moonheart.* (Although just about anything by either author would keep me content).

I have been an SF/Fantasy fan since I was about 10 years old (circa 1960), when I discovered Ray Bradbury. His writing in turn led me to other early Masters—Robert Bloch, Andre Norton, Isaac Asimov, John D. McDonald, to name but a few. I read the *Goremghast* trilogy before Tolkien's epic works. Consequently, I understand Mr. Jones's feelings about the SF/Fantasy writings popular with his generation. But had I never read the "Classics" on the high school reading list, I would have missed out on a richness and depth that has, ultimately, opened my mind to incredible things. I hope Mr. Jones's rather narrow-minded appetite for reading doesn't, in the end, rob him of something valuable.

Sincerely,
Denise Cardos

Thanks for your input, Denise. If you saw the April 2001 issue, you will have seen Mr. Jones's reply to my editorial.

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By Heinz Insu Fenkl

Heavens and Hell-o: Why can't Americans just learn to say "Good day"?

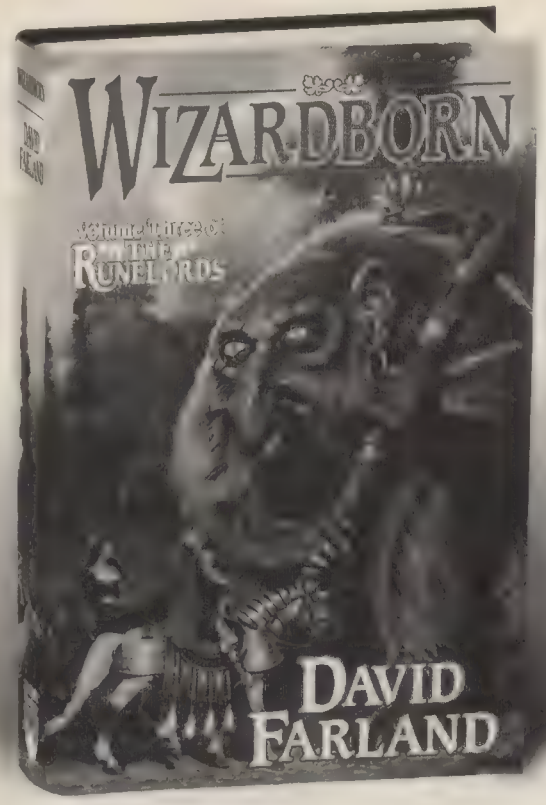
Charon is shown crossing the Styx to Hades in this painting by Joachim Patinir (1515-24). The artist's vision of Hell is as a dark, smoky war-torn land.

1. hello?

"Hello" is such a characteristic American greeting that, back when I was a child in Korea, it was our name for Americans. It was, after all, the first sound out of the GIs' mouths when they saw anyone. Now that I am a professor with 20 years of academic inquiry behind me, I turn again to the question of why Americans say "Hello" and not "Good day" or its many counterparts—"Bonjour," "Guten Tag," "Buon giorno," "G'day"—to greet each other; and I do this because my inquiry into the origins of symbols and folk meanings seems constantly to skirt around the profound meanings of the utterly mundane.

In Korea, one says "*Anyonghaseyo*" (literally: "Are you in peace?"); in China, "*Ni hao*" (literally: "Are you well?"). What one says as a greeting has understandable meaning in most cultures; the speaker knows what the word or phrase refers to. Over the years I've occasionally surveyed my college classes in creative writing and literature and discovered that not a single one of the thousands of students in those classes knew what "Hello" actually refers to. When I turn the question around and ask what "Good-bye" means, there will generally be at least one student in a class who can explain that it derives from "God be with you" (which makes it quite similar to the Spanish "*Adios*" and the French "*Adieu*"). The historical transformation of "God" into "good," as in the Puritan appellation "Goodman" for "Man of God," seem to be well understood. (If you doubt whether "be with you" can be condensed into "bye" (*be* with *ye*—> *be w' ye*—> *b'ye*), just keep in mind that in England, "Worchester" is pronounced "Wooster" and the name "Feathershanhaw" is pronounced "Fanshaw.") But the reference of "Hello" remains a mystery to people who use it many times a day—even if it's mostly to answer the telephone.

Several years ago, there was a movement afoot in a Bible belt town to do away with "Hello" because it had the word "Hell" in it. Some high-minded person decid-ed that the good Christian thing to do would be not only to omit the reference to Hell, but to undo its ungodly damage by replacing "Hello" with "Heaven-O." Obviously, this movement did not catch on (one even doubts the authenticity of the report since it appeared on one of those infotainment shows such as *Hard Copy*), but I bother to mention this bit of trivia because it illustrates the fact that people actually *do* pause to wonder about the meaning of the greeting and they do actually attempt to analyze it logically. One of the basic principles in linguistic



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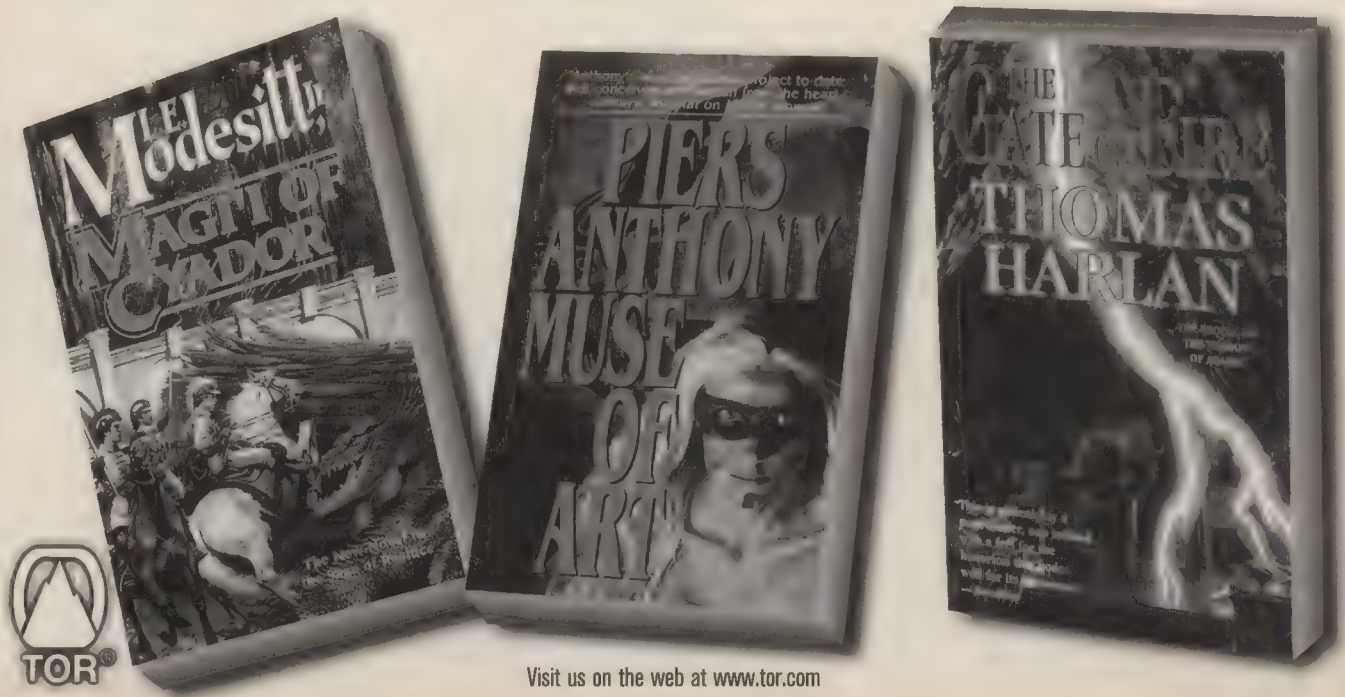

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analysis is to take words apart into their basic elements and inquire about their meaning in their original language(s). Whoever divided "Hello" into "Hell" and "O" wasn't far off; he or she just forgot to consider the importance of examining the word's non-English origins.

"Hello" was not a word invented by Thomas Edison or Alexander Bell for answering the telephone, as some people believe. Many etymologists are quick to dismiss "Hello" as a variant of "Hallo," "Hullo," and "Halloo"—all words used for hailing or greeting in the past. While their argument is partially correct, since the variation follows a predictable evolution, they fail to inquire into the odd and unique spelling of the American "Hello." When you take time to peel away the overlapping layers of meaning, the word has a fascinating history, and it turns out to be a prime example of a pragmatic summarizing symbol that reflects the complexity of the American unconscious.

2. Good Heavens!

Since Hell and Heaven are usually considered diametric opposites, it is necessary to explicate the two concepts together. In most cultures (both Eastern and Western), Heaven, or the heavens, signifies the source of light, which is associated with the divine. If you look at cosmologies and creation myths, you will generally find that the world was created through some union or interaction of the sky and the Earth. Since humans live on the Earth, that plane is generally more mundane than that of heaven, which is the realm of the mysterious Sun, Moon, stars, and planets—cosmic bodies whose motions seem to indicate a precise order. Heaven is therefore the place in which the divine abides; it becomes associated with gods, angels, immortals, the Heavenly Emperor. In Chinese cosmology, the great Jade Emperor resides in the Heavenly Kingdom; likewise, the God of the Bible has His throne in Heaven and the world after the second coming is said to be Heaven on Earth.

Heaven is the source of sunlight and rain, and so, particularly in agricultural societies, it has profound life-positive associations with the sources of fertility, and therefore, life itself. That makes Heaven the source of good. When the heavens turn "bad" by bringing drought, foul weather, or long periods of darkness, the blame usually rests on some failing in the human realm. Even today this notion remains deeply rooted in some cultures. For example, the Chinese government is always quite sensitive to the effect of natural disasters on public opinion because, in the past, such things as flood, drought, and earthquake were signs that the emperor had lost the Mandate of Heaven. At such times, dissident religious movements had the potential to overthrow the emperor. (And this is precisely why, in this era of natural disasters, the Chinese government has set out to systematically destroy the Falun Gong movement, which it characterizes as a religious cult disguised as a martial arts fad.)

China and the United States are generally good examples of how various notions of Heaven become compiled differently, and yet into rather similar symbols. Since Heaven is the source of light in general, both during the day and at night, it represents life-positive qualities, goodness, and order to nearly all cultures, whether their origin be agrarian, seafaring, or nomadic: the vault of the heavens provides the template of cosmic order that permits the fundamental abilities of navigation and time-keeping that result in societies' ability to plant crops, harvest, trade, and find their way across deserts and oceans. Whether the merged social traditions are communism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, or whether they are democratic capitalism, Christianity, and Judaism, the end results put the concept of Heaven in a very similar position (and this despite the American division of church and state or the Chinese government's official policy of atheism).

Heaven as the Edenic afterlife paradise likewise exists in both East and West. Buddhists (though it may seem to contradict their religious philosophy) have a Western Paradise, and Christians, of course, have their Heaven, often depicted as full of classical Greek architecture and fluffy clouds. Although descriptions of Heaven are as particular as Dante's descriptions of the many-circled Inferno in his *Divine Comedy*, most people take Heaven for granted. After all, whether we are talking about stereotyped and mischaracterized Heavens such as the American images of "The Happy Hunting Ground" or Valhalla, the various Heavens are all far less interesting than their counterpart Hells.

3. An Etymology of Hell

Since I'm discussing "Hello" as a uniquely American term, it's necessary to look at Hell in its American context, which means examining its Judeo-Christian origins.

The 1611 edition of the King James Bible uses the word "Hell" numerous times, but subsequent versions, even the New King James Bible, tend to replace it with more appropriate approximations of the original Greek or Hebrew terms. If you do your biblical scholarship, you'll see that the Hebrew *Ge-hinnom* (Gehanna) and *Sheol*, as well as the Greek *Hades*, are all equated with Hell in various translations. This brings up an interesting consideration: Since the translators were attempting to convey meaning, we should look at the references of those Hebrew and Greek words. At the same time, we need to pursue the etymology of the English word "Hell" separately, which means staying closer to the sound value of the word and following its Germanic trajectory. What's re-markable is that the routes of inquiry intertwine to form a historical cross-section of Hell as both word and concept.

Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516) used vivid and terrifying symbolism to convey his vision of Hell.

Let me begin with *Hades*, since its equation with "Hell" makes sense in both meaning and etymology. *Hades*, from the Greek, literally means "unseen," which ex-plains its use to refer to the netherworld of the dead (the "shades") and the presiding god, Hades. *Hades* happens to be the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Sheol*, also meaning "unseen" (which occurs 65 times in the Bible; the original King James Version only translates it as "Hell" 31 times). Although the initial referents of the Hebrew and Greek words are the same, it is important to note that while the Greeks built a complex netherworld mythology around the word *Hades*, the Hebrew *Sheol* does not share those associations.

Gehanna, another Greek form of a Hebrew word, occurs a dozen times in the New Testament with a meaning that—at first—seems to reflect our current notion of Hell. (In fact, Christ uses the term several times in a rather

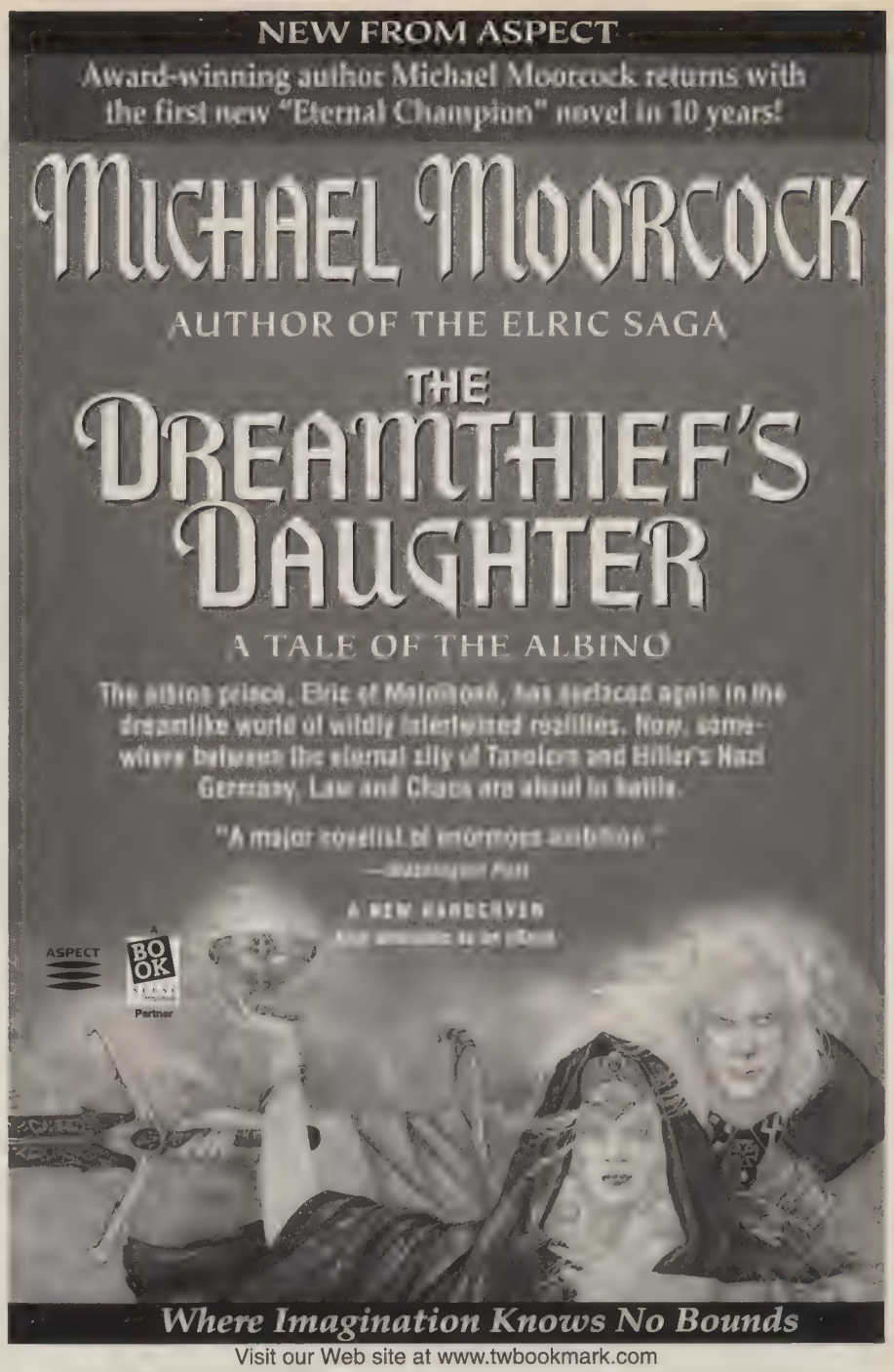
critical context.) *Gehanna* comes from the Hebrew *ge-hinnom*, which means "Valley of Hinnom." This valley is probably the most hellish of the biblical references, since it was there that the old Israelites offered up their children as burnt sacrifices on the altars of Baal. In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah warns that this valley will be called the "Valley of Slaughter" (Jer 7:30-33). The prophecy was fulfilled quite literally in 70 AD during the bloody destruction of Jerusalem.

The irony of Gehanna is that, during the time of Christ, it was Jerusalem's garbage dump, quite similar to today's landfills—probably full of pits and smoldering flames from burning refuse. For a Jew, who would have been much concerned with proper burial, to be relegated to Gehanna after death would have been a truly hellish fate, but it is certainly not the fiery pit we imagine as the place of eternal damnation. Jonathan Edwards, best known for his Hellfire-and-Damnation imagery in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," would have been rather disappointed with the original Gehanna.

According to some etymologists, the English word "Hell" comes from the Indo-European root, *kel*, which means "cover" or "hide" (the *K* and the aspirated *H* sounds are related). Because of the fluctuation of vowel sounds, *kel* is the origin of both "hall" (a covered or sheltered place) and "hell" (a hidden place, related to the unseen *Sheol* and *Hades*). In Anglo-Saxon, *hel* has the same underlying meaning.

But another direct link to the English "Hell"—particularly considering the German influence on Protestantism—is the Germanic and Greek *hel*. This is where things become curious, and this is where the biblical scholars tend not to tread, because the root meaning of *hel* is clearly related to light. In Greek, *hel* is the root for words like Helios (the Sun god) and Helen of Troy. Our English "Hellenic," which refers to Greece itself, often called the Land of Light, also has the same root. *Hel* is a positive root, although the name Helen can also be read as "torch," considering what her presence did to Troy. (Charlotte Brontë, highly underrated in her use of symbolic character names, plays with this light/fire dichotomy in *Jane Eyre*, in which she calls her most angelic character "Helen Burns." The evil schoolmarms of Lowood constantly warn her that she will burn in Hell, and she dies of a fever in Jane's arms. Note how her name ironically encodes the warning: Helen Burns = Burns en Hel. Brontë obviously didn't mean for Helen to burn in Hell—the reference is to her luminosity and her afterlife in the realm of Light.)

In Greek mythology, *hel* also happens to be in the name of Jason's scorned wife, Helles, in the story of the Golden Fleece (which is often read as an allegory about the Sun). If one pursues the Greek associations with the root *hel*, it is not possible to avoid its connection to the ancient Egyptian *her* (since the Egyptians used *R* and *L* interchangeably); that avenue of inquiry provides some puz-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zling but rewarding links to light and fire. To name the major connection, the Egyptian name for the Sun god is *Heru*, which could also be read *Helu*, connecting the Egyptian Horus with the Greek Helios (and also to our word "hero").

In the Elder Edda, one of the ur texts of Teutonic culture, Hel is the goddess of the dead and ruler of the nine hells of Helheim. (Oddly, her home is called *Regnvat*, which means "wet by rain," but that makes sense if we link her name to fire and fire to the life force—her realm is a "hidden" one in which the life force has been doused. Hel rules a dark and shadowy underworld more akin to Hades than to the fire-and-brimstone Hell of the Christians. But note how *Regnvat* also links Hel to the sky, which is the source of both rain and light—the life-positive forces.) The German word for "Hell" is *Hslle*, but that relates to so many other words and concepts that I will have to devote another column to it.

4. The Hermeneutic Circle

So what is a poor, unwitting American to make of the terrible burden that "Hello" seems to carry? Let me quickly list some of the basic readings we can infer from what I've discussed so far. "Hello" could be the phonetic rendition of:

Hell + O = the burning pit of flames in which the damned suffer for eternity; the O is the pit itself or designates the circles of Hell.

Hieronymus Bosch's surreal depictions of Hell were ahead of their time.

Hel + Lo! = behold light! As in "Lo and behold!"

Hell + Low = an indication that Hell is below as opposed to Heaven above. The "Low" could also refer to *morally* low.

Hel + O = solar disk. A reference to light and the circle of the Sun. This could also be read as a halo of light, associating it with holiness and angels.

I've glossed over only four of many potential pairings of the syllables that make "Hello," but these should be enough to establish how the word carries meanings that could complement and amplify or entirely contradict each other.

In Hermeneutics, which is the study of how words carry meaning, the endeavor is considered inherently circular and never-ending. Words possess a sort of organic life of their own, and if they have been around for long enough, they carry with them glimpses of all the cultures that used them. Since the political, aesthetic, and religious ideologies of cultures change, words often loop around on themselves and become inverted in meaning, though in the process they retain echoes of their original intent. These "echoes" are often amplified by associated words.

For example, the contraction (or is it a euphemism?) for "Hello" is "Hi!" This doesn't seem to make sense, but it is perfectly logical if we read "Hello" as "Behold Light!" which would be a reference to Heaven, and thus "high." "Low" also happens to be a contraction of "Hello," but that form is quite rare compared to "Hi!" Note how this contraction into Hi/Low illustrates circular logic.

The most common euphemism for Hell is, strangely enough, "Heck." This does not seem to make sense either, since the *L* sound has no regular transformation into the *K* sound. But if one considers that "Heck" is short for Hekate (also spelled Hecate), it makes perfect logical sense. Hekate happens to be the Greek goddess of death, and though she is associated with Hell due to the Greeks' foregrounding of

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her negative qualities, she is said, in ancient sources like Hesiod, to be the original goddess of the three realms: Heaven, Earth, and Tartarus (a sort of limbo, which is reserved for angels in Judeo-Christian lore). In Theogeny (416), Hesiod writes of Hekate, "In starry heaven she has her place, and the immortal gods greatly respect her." (Hekate, by the way, through her association with the dark of the Moon and thus the color black, is also connected with the black Hindu goddess of death, Kali, and the Christian black Madonna figures.) Once again we find the connection of light and the other world melded together.

In the process of explicating "Hello," I've had to illustrate how our various notions of Hell seem both similar and contradictory. The truth is that the contradictions point at a common logic at a higher level. Even if we take the path of the "hidden" as the point of access to ideas of the other world or the afterlife, we eventually arrive at the underlying idea that this world is a realm of light. Antiquarians, anthropologists, and religious scholars are all arguing about these issues, but the recent research into Near Death Experiences (NDEs) suggests that regardless of one's religious background, one tends to enter the "light at the end of the tunnel" in the other world (those unfortunate enough to have a bad NDE into the burning pit eventually come around as well). Hell-O *is* Heaven-O. In Tibetan Buddhism, this is well understood in the *Bardo Thodol*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which contains explicit instructions to the soul regarding how to navigate among the various illusory "hells" on its way to reincarnation or enlightenment.

5. Hello, Good-bye

So what does it actually mean when one says "Hello?" to answer the telephone? The word itself is incredibly complex, as you have seen, but its function is very pragmatic. We use "Hello" as a sort of sonar *ping!* to establish the terms of our relationship to that faceless (i.e., "hidden") voice on the other end of the line. The meaning of the word is full of potentials that become activated during the conversation so that it could range across the full spectrum. A good example of this variation is what happens when you get no answer on the other end and your first cheerful "Hello" becomes subsequently darker as you repeat it, "Hello? Hello? *Hello? Hello!*" ending, perhaps as an expression of great anxiety or as the preface to a threat.

In the end, the symmetry makes perfect logical sense. If "Hello" means "Behold light!" or "Hell below," then saying "God be with you" afterward could be an affirmation, a compensation, or a statement of sympathy. The interaction in between is what the circle inscribes, and we time-bound mortals are stuck having to separate greeting and leave-taking. But remember the Tralfamadoran greeting in Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse Five*, in which Billy Pilgrim was *unstuck* in time? It was "Hello Good-bye."❧

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By Resa Nelson

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It's spring.

If you live in the South, your climate may already be well on its way toward summer. If you live up North, chances are that you may just now be seeing crocuses pop up through the last traces of snow. Wherever you live, we're all in the midst of the renewal and rebirth of seasons.

And, if you're a Horror fan, get ready for the renewal and rebirth of two classic legends—vampires and mummies.

Look for a fresh, new interpretation of vampire mythology in *The Forsaken*, a new film scheduled for release on April 27 by Screen Gems. The story begins when Sean (played by Kerr Smith of *Final Destination* and TV's *Dawson's Creek*) needs to find a way to get from LA to his sister's wedding in Florida. Sean works at a film-editing facility, so he doesn't have much money. He decides to hire himself out as a driver who transports cars across the United States. He's assigned to drive a $55,000 vintage Mercedes convertible from LA to Florida.

But Sean makes one terrible mistake. He picks up a hitchhiker, Nick (played by Brendan Fehr of *Final Destination*, *Disturbing Behavior*, and TV's *Roswell*).

Nick has been bitten by a vampire, but he hasn't turned into one himself. Not yet. The bite of a vampire transmits vampirism like a disease, and Nick knows how to slow down its progression before it takes hold. If Nick can track down and kill the vampire who bit him before Nick himself turns into a vampire, he can save himself. Nick is a hunter.

Evelyn O'Connell (Rachel Weisz) faces new evils in The Mummy Returns. *She and husband Rick return to Egypt to rescue their son.*

Director/writer Joe Cardone explains how he conceived and developed his reworking of the vampire legend. "I love the old Vlad the Impaler concept. I just didn't want to do that. I had recently read a book by Aphrodite Jones called *The Embrace*. It was loosely based on a true story about some young kids who traveled the roads between Kentucky and Florida. They were from the Goth movement of five or six years ago. They'd taken the whole game of it one step farther. They were cutting themselves and drinking each other's blood. They'd gotten into this whole real vampire thing. Obviously they were mixing drugs with it. One thing led to another, and it ultimately led to the murder of a family. And that kind of fascinated me.

"It ran in the vein of some films that have always intrigued me—*Badlands* or *In Cold Blood*. Kathy Bigelow had done something similar to that in *Near Dark*, and what I wanted to do was a road picture. A true road picture. No one had combined vampires and a road picture like *Vanishing Point*. I stuck with that and decided we would come up with a whole new approach, throwing out the old Bram Stoker."

While the movie focuses on the present American Southwest, Cardone created a new vampire legend as the story's starting point. The legend begins in the 11th century during the first religious Crusade. In the years 1097-98, there was a siege at Antioch, at that time the greatest city in Syria. On the

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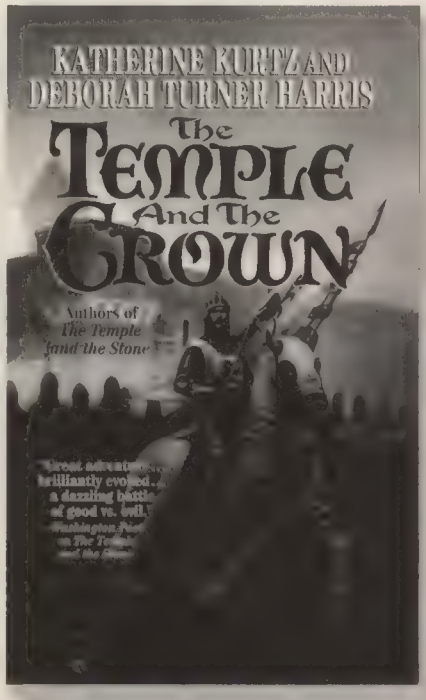

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first day of battle, the Turks slaughtered two hundred French knights. It was winter, and only nine French knights survived the battle. As snow began to fall that evening, they knew that they were doomed to die of exposure to the elements. But then the angel Abaddon appeared to the knights and offered them eternal life. One knight refused. The other eight knights accepted Abaddon's offer and sealed the deal by killing their friend and drinking his blood.

"They hid out in caves until sunlight," Cardone explains. "The battle was over and they were saved. But when they came out in the sunlight and looked at each other, they were so ashamed at what they'd done that they huddled off into the far reaches of the Earth and were cursed for the rest of their lives. They became the forsaken."

So where did Cardone draw the line between fact and fiction?

"The siege of Antioch is true," Cardone says. "It was one of the bloodiest of all battles in the Crusade. [According to medieval legend] Abaddon is the angel of death that will appear in battle sites to collect souls of the dead. In those elements, there is a sense of reality.

"What I wanted to do was tell a story about young adults who were vampires and were traveling the roads. And yet I needed a legend. I wasn't going to make it a docu-drama. And so we created this whole new legend of the forsaken.

"Then we threw out all the elements that we possibly could. There are no fangs in this movie. There's none of that. They don't morph. What we did was take it back to that *Embrace* aspect that sets the reality but underlines the legend."

As the story progresses, Sean and Nick pick up another passenger. This time, it's a young woman named Megan (played by Izabella Miko of *Coyote Ugly*), who's in bad shape. Nick not only recognizes that she's been bitten and is well on her way to becoming a vampire, but that he can use her as bait to lure the vampire who bit him, Kit (played by Johnathon Schaech of *That Thing You Do* and *How to Make an American Quilt*).

Cardone describes how the caliber of the actors made his script come alive.

"These kids, they're really good. Three of them come off hit WB shows. They've certainly honed their licks for quite some time. And Johnathon Schaech I've wanted to work with for a while. He's going to surprise people. He's just so different. So evil and nefarious in this. Izabella Miko is totally different in this movie. She's really fascinating. It's a much darker character. Phina Oruche [TV's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*], who's a great Shakespearean actress from Nigeria, no pun intended, really sunk her teeth into this. The most fun I had and the most intriguing aspect of it was working with these actors."

In fact, Cardone went to great lengths to prepare his actors. Oruche describes how Cardone gave her a copy of *The Embrace* and how reading the book had an impact on her work. "That really opened my eyes," Oruche says. "It helped me create a character who does bad things but isn't necessarily evil. She's like any teenager who wants to fit in, to find excitement in her life. Only she goes about it in the wrong way and winds up paying the price."

Miko describes her approach to portraying Megan. "What made the whole thing so interesting was Joe's interpretation. These are not cartoonish characters. They're real. My character has very little dialogue, but I was able to use my body in the film to suggest her inner turmoil, her shame, her conflicted emotions about becoming a vampire."

ABOVE: Brendan Fraser returns as Rick O'Connell to face Imhotep, the Scorpion King, and hordes of creatures and monsters. RIGHT: Kit the vampire is played by Johnathon Schaech.

"I was riveted by the story right from the start," says Schaech. He describes his character, Kit. "He's 900 years old. He's been around the world for a long time, and he made a choice to become one of the forsaken. But by now you can see that he's tired of the constant struggle he's had to stay alive. There's an element of death wish in his reckless behavior."

On one hand, the film is primarily a road

picture, which was shot over the course of seven weeks during the summer on the outskirts of Yuma, Arizona. Although five-and-a half weeks were shot at night, the temperatures rose as high as 120 degrees.

"You don't expect to see vampires in the desert," says producer Scott Einbinder. "Placing these gorgeous young people in this god-forsaken terrain creates an amazing contrast and establishes a razor-sharp tension."

At the same time, the elements of vampirism permeate the film.

"They ride at night and they don't kill like vampires," Cardone says. "They don't suck blood. They lap blood, which means that they have to kill with knives or guns or whatever. And they do this for the reason that they don't want to draw attention to themselves as vampires. So they can be anything. They can be that serial killer riding the rails and killing old women. Or two young men, two sons killing their family to make it look like it's a psycho killing.

"And the hunter, who is played by Brendan Fehr, he understands. He looks at newspaper articles, television reports, news reports. After quite some time, he can fashion patterns, and that's how he tracks them. They move across the United States. They travel in cars and sleep in the trunk during the day."

In other words, the vampires (or "bloodletters," as they're known) fit into society in the same way that serial killers and psychopaths blend in among us.

"They're not like *Dracula 2000*," Cardone says. "They're not in the classical garb. Even though (Johnathon Schaech's character, Kit) is 960-something years old, he dresses very hip. He looks like something out of *Details* magazine. It's a really modern approach."

While the forsaken dress to blend in with the rest of the world, there are some things they can't hide ... some things that set them apart.

"Since we're not using fangs, and we're not morphing, we went with a different approach," Cardone says. "We went with the fact that their mucus is always bloody. When predators become really aroused—either in a feeding frenzy or sexually—they salivate. So they regurgitate and they salivate blood. Their eyes tear blood.

"It certainly added a different element to the blood aspect. You can't do a vampire movie without blood. And since we weren't sucking blood—we were killing people and lapping blood like a cat would—we added the salivation.

"And the other aspect that we added is that once you've been bitten, you can stay alive on something similar to an AIDS cocktail. It's drugs. It's a cocktail of pills that was developed by a doctor who was bitten in San Francisco five years ago. That's how Brendan Fehr stays alive. That's how he keeps the others, once they're bitten, alive. It doesn't work on everyone else, so it creates a time bomb, because sooner or later you're going to turn [into a vampire]. It's the thing that keeps you from turning. It slows the coursing of the disease in your blood. It buys you time to find the forsaken. If you can find the forsaken that you were bitten by, and kill it, then you're cured."

In reinventing the vampire myth, Cardone acknowledges that this movie isn't for everyone. It's intense. It's visceral. It taps into the American psyche in an unusual and disturbing way.

"A vampire movie is a vampire movie," Cardone says. "And there's always going to be that chuckle and that sneer of, 'Hm. You made a vampire movie.' The bottom line is that we set out to do something a little bit different and a little cleverer than what has been done before. And a little darker, I think. I think we accomplished that.

"It's extremely violent at times. And that's a hard pill for the studio to swallow at this point in time due to the political arena. If we're going to reflect ourselves in music or film or whatever it's going to be—whether it's Eminem or whoever—the bottom line is that we are a violent species. We can't pretend that we're not. But it should be violence in which you understand that the violent nature of it is part of our species and that it's not palatable. It shouldn't be interesting. It shouldn't be easy to accept.

"And I don't think it is in this. We ran into trouble with the MPAA already with the trailer. I'm anxious to see the final product. I know there were major things that the MPAA

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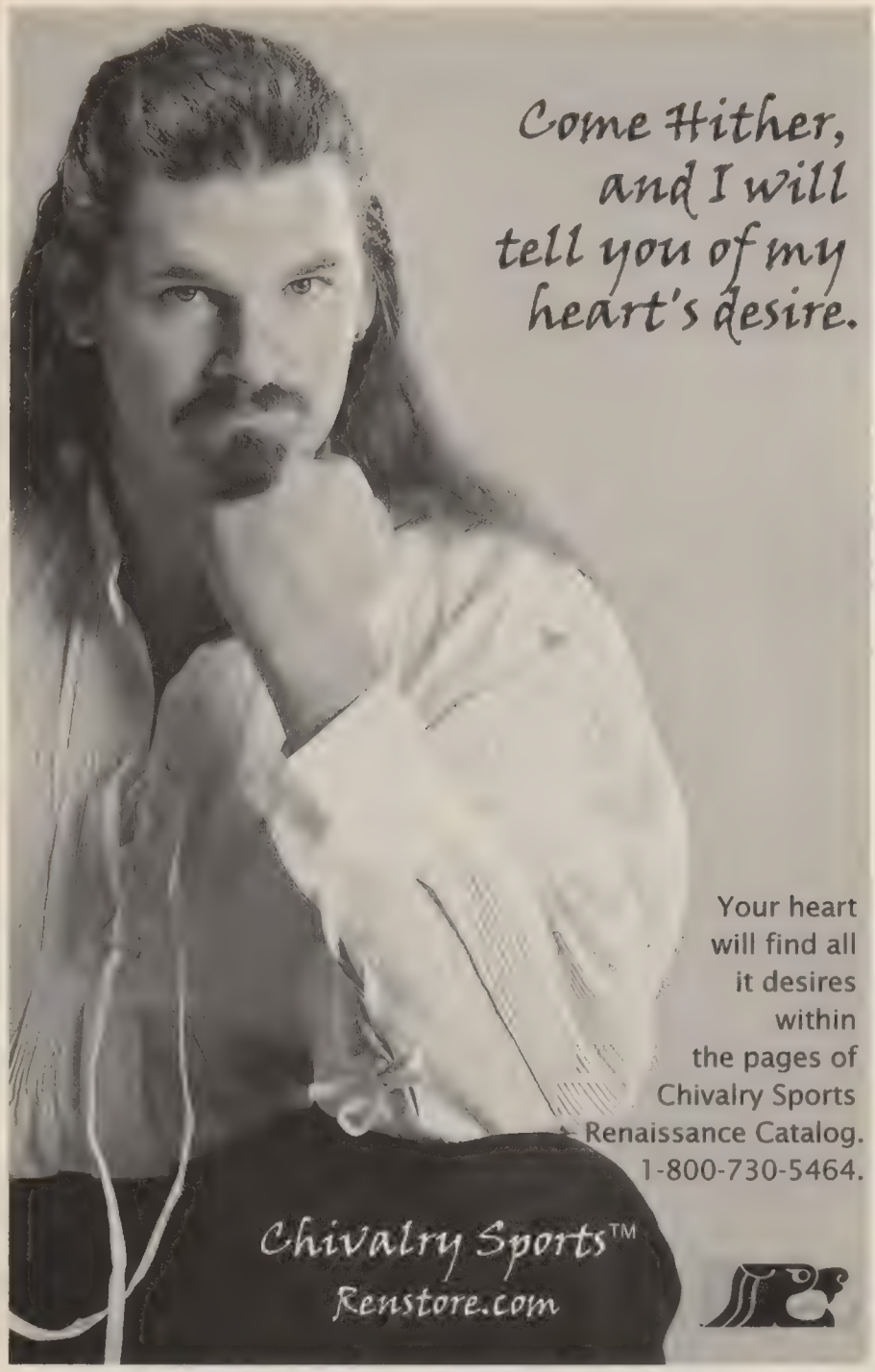
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addressed. They felt that even the trailer was too intense. It'll be interesting to see what's going to happen with it. There is definitely imagery in it that is disturbing.

"The bottom line is it's a ride. It's a nonstop ride. It's a car chase. It's *In Cold Blood* meets *Vanishing Point*, only in this particular case, the killer's a vampire. It is a violent film. And a very intense, very bizarre film in many senses."

On May 11, Universal Pictures releases its new film, *The Mummy Returns*, a sequel to the 1999 blockbuster.

One of the strengths of *The Mummy* was its painstaking attention to the details of ancient Egypt. Set designer Allan Cameron based his work on the 200-year-old etchings and lithographs made by Napoleon's artists when he invaded Egypt. Director/writer Stephen Sommers has a love of ancient Egypt and mythology. In fact, Sommers even went to the extent of asking a UCLA professor to translate dialogue into the dialect that was spoken by ancient Egyptians. Sommers brings that depth of attention to detail back to *The Mummy Returns* both in his follow-up script and his direction.

"I think you'll like this one," says producer Jim Jacks. "As always, Steve grabs characters out of ancient Egyptian history to become important characters in the movie."

In *The Mummy*, Brendan Fraser played a French Foreign Legionnaire who meets Rachel Weisz, portraying a librarian in the museum in Cairo. Her character's brother, played by John Hannah, joined them as they searched for a lost City of the Dead in hopes of finding buried treasure. However, once there, they accidentally revived Imhotep, an ancient Egyptian priest who'd been cursed. Fraser, Weisz, and Hannah all return in the sequel.

"The movie opens in ancient Egypt with the Scorpion King," says Jacks. "That was the man who united Egypt and was the first pharaoh. We have this legend that he sold his soul to Anubis—essentially, he sold his soul to the devil to unite Egypt. And then the devil claims him.

"We really don't go beyond the moment where his soul was claimed by Anubis. At that point, we go to 1935. The prologue is very similar to the prologue in the first movie. You're setting up the mythology and the hero and the villain. As always, these things have tragic villains.

"The idea is that the Scorpion King and his Anubis army, which are these horrible monsters that are half-man and half-jackal, will someday come back when they're called."

The Mummy Returns takes place 10 years after the *The Mummy* ends. The characters played by Fraser and Weisz are now married and have an eight-year-old son. They go out on archaeological digs. At one dig in Egypt, Weisz finds a bracelet. Once they've all returned to London, the bracelet attaches itself to the arm of their son. It sets off a timing device that will eventually trigger the rebirth of the Scorpion King and his army.

In the meantime, another faction has returned to the City of the Dead with the goal of bringing Imhotep back to life. They plan to use Imhotep as a weapon against the Scorpion King.

So how do you go about making a sequel to a highly successful movie?

"It's a tricky thing, making a sequel," Jacks says. "It's got to be the same, but better. You've got to deliver [all the elements, such as the historical accuracy], but at the same time, you've got to do it even more so and more spectacularly. That takes a lot of thought and a lot of support from the studio."

Jacks notes that one of the most difficult aspects of making any sequel is creating a script that's worth making into a movie. "[The studio] wanted the movie two years after the first one. You'll notice that most sequels go three years after. That gives you a year to write, a year to prepare, and a year for production and postproduction. We were doing the writing and the prepping at the same time. It was difficult, but then again we had the director, who was writing the script, and that helped a lot."

But making a sequel must be easy when the first movie was a blockbuster, right?

"It's easy, but you end up spending more money," Jacks says. "The only thing that we went over budget on was the effects. We showed [the studio] a bunch of stuff, and they said, 'No problem. We'll give you money for the extra effects.' I'm very pleased."

While the effects in *The Mummy* were rich and elaborate, the effects in *The Mummy Returns* raise the bar even higher.

Hitchhiking proves to be dangerous in The Forsaken.

"All the favorite effects of the first movie get at least one repeat," Jacks says. "Like the soldier mummies and the scarabs. They all get their moment of doing it again. But we have a lot more monsters and more adventure. Our scene with the soldier mummies is much more complicated and much bigger than anything in the first movie.

"Remember, a lot of this takes place in London. Everything's not taking place in 1920's Cairo and the desert. It's taking place in 1935 London."

Shot on location in London, the filmmakers faced a challenge in finding a way to make present-day London look like pre-World War II London.

"A lot of London has been built up since the war," Jacks says. "So you've got to make sure that that's all set. Then you have more effects. And just getting permission to shoot around the city is always a challenge. They closed down Tower Bridge for us for two nights."

In addition to London, *The Mummy Returns* was shot in Morocco and Jordan. "Where we were shooting was way out in the desert, so you aren't really shooting in a vacation spot. But, on the other hand, it's certainly interesting to see a beautiful part of the world that under normal circumstances you probably wouldn't see.

"We're very happy with it. We have the director's cut. We think the movie is substantially better than the first one."

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By Gahan Wilson

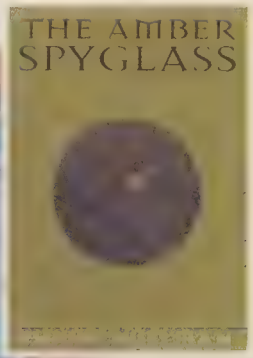
Pullman pulls it off, and Powers powers up.

I have had the pleasure of reading and the privilege of reviewing the two prior novels in Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials (The Golden Compass* and *The Subtle Knife)* and have been waiting with steadily increasing suspense (Mr. Pullman is nothing if not a master of suspense!) for the promised third for a increasing length of time.

With the passing of months growing into the passing of years (or so, at least, it seems, I have not looked it up, though it may in fact *be* years), my apprehensive speculations grew more fretful. Had the author written himself into some sort of inescapable corner? Was he suffering from a gigantic and possibly fatal attack of writers' block? Had a jumpy fiend from an alternate universe, alarmed at the deadly accuracy of Pullman's speculations, sent minions to destroy him lest he reveal all? *Could it be possible there would be no third book!?!*

Happily it has turned out that all along Pullman was busily and most successfully bringing the series to a brilliant resolution by crafting ***The Amber Spyglass*** *(Knopf, NYC; 518 pp.; hardcover; $19.95).* It has now been published, it is out, and if you have the more than reasonable sum of $19.95 plus tax, you can saunter into your local bookstore and buy it and I strongly suggest that you do—provided that you have also bought or will buy volumes 1 and 2 in the series—for in the finished trilogy of *His Dark Materials* we now have one of those rare fantastic adventures which are absolutely bound to be beloved and lasting classics.

Paddy, the gargoyle assigned to St. Patrick's Cathedral, glowers at the streets below. Do you see a Disney movie here?



When we first meet the heroine of the story, Lyra Belacqua, she is a feisty 11-year-old growing up in the precincts of an alternate college in an alternate Oxford in an alternate England in an alternate universe to ours in which all humans are born with personal daemons, usually of the opposite gender, who stay with them up until the moment of their shared deaths. While the humans are children the daemons are free to change shape according to whim or convenience (Lyra's daemon, Pantalaimon, is in early years mostly a brown moth or an ermine), but when their human reaches adulthood they become fixed in a shape that tends to reflect their human companion's essential personality. You would be well advised to be cagey around a human whose daemon is, say, a poisonous snake or a destructive monkey.

Lyra impetuously plunges into increasingly complex adventures right from the start, moving from winning bold battles with the town's toughest kids and rapidly escalating to foiling a very grown up assassination attempt on her father, the powerful Lord Asriel, who is deeply involved with a mysterious cosmic entity known as Dust, otherwise known as Shadows or Dark Matter or *Sraf.*

Eventually Lyra encounters Will Parry who lives in another Oxford, the one of our world, and who

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"Fantasy, romance, adventure; something of mystery, something of the supernatural; a weaving together of ancient legends, older by far than any historical records, with the scientific knowledge of the present day; and side by side with these, yet far above and mastering them, the power of human love and willing self-sacrifice, the whole held together by a shimmering, glittering web of imagination . . . It marks the debut of a writer possessed of a very unusual, perhaps one might almost call it extraordinary, richness of imagination."—*New York Times Book*
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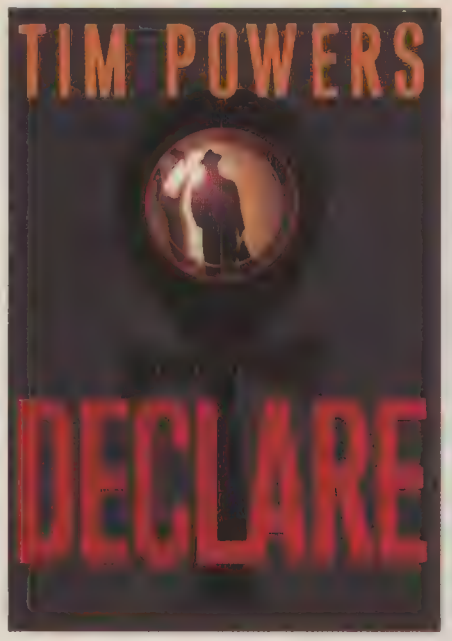
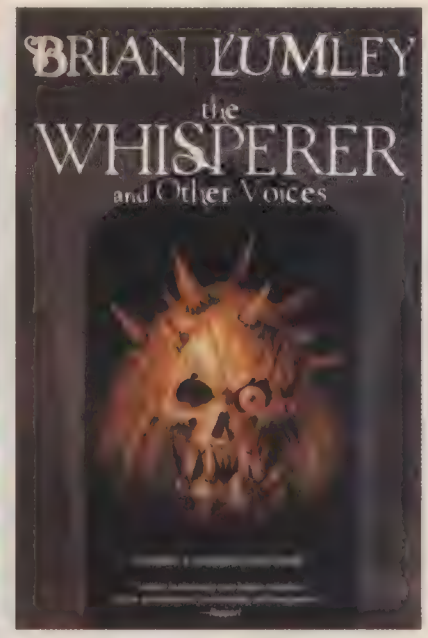
lives far removed from its realm of colleges. It is she and he joined together who start the interwoven processes which profoundly change both of their universes, and many others besides, not to mention the villains and heroes that inhabit them.





It is the complexity of these villains and heroes that sets *His Dark Materials* starkly apart from the overwhelming bulk of adventure stories of this kind for they are all—human or otherwise—as interestingly hard to predict as could be hoped for. There are decidedly good guys and bad guys aplenty in the trilogy but they are by no means the paper cutouts all too often encountered in sweeping Fantasy epics; they are capable of surprising and even teaching the reader by all sorts of intriguing maturations and turnabouts. There is not only great instruction as to villainy and its sorry motivations, there is also kindness where you least expect it, and astounding triumph where there seemed to be no hope at all.

And there is no end to the entertaining variety of these multitudes of characters. As a brief and far from complete sampling of them you will encounter such exotics as Iofur Rakinson, polar bear King of the armored bears of Svalbard; Giacomo Paradisi, unhappy bearer of the subtle knife—there is nothing sharper!—which can slice through one universe to another; Ruta Skadi, the beautiful Queen of the Latvian witches who flies through the night on pine branches; the sinisterly seductive Mrs. Coulter who is skillful at carrying out cruel experiments involving children; Balthamos and Baruch, two low-grade angels and lovers you will never forget; Lord Roke, the tiny Gallivespian spy master who boldly rides dragonflies and who can kill you with the spurs growing from his heels, and—to end the list with a particularly chilling example—Father Hugh MacPhail, President for Life of the Consistorial Court of Discipline, who is at his

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

A Triumph of Souls, by Alan Dean Foster, Time Warner paperback, $6.99. "Journeys of the Catechist—Book 3." Virtue is the greatest weapon of all in this, the third in the series of tales involving Etjole Ehomba and his brave entourage. Ocean adventure, seaweed people, skeleton armies, mountain giants, and prairie danger lurk and threaten in the pages of this book. The herdsman, the swordsman, the deadly cat, the man-beast, and the beautiful stranger called Rose join forces to battle unstoppable evil. Foster triumphs herein as the author of this high-Fantasy tale. It appears this quest is doomed to fail—or is it? Will the prophecy of Death and Hymneth prevail?

Fortress of Dragons, by C.J. Cherryh, EOS paperback, $6.99. *Fortress of Dragons* follows *Fortress in the Eye of Time, Fortress of Owls,* and *Fortress of Eagles* in the Fantasy saga of Tristen, "both more and less than a man." Wizardry v. sorcery, a sword marked "Illusion" and "Truth," friends both royal and warrior make up the fabric of this intricate tapestry. Cherryh's work has been called powerfully magical. In this, the finishing piece, Tristen must battle a pretender to Cefwyn's throne and stem the flow of an awesome tide of darkness. Readers new to the Fortress series will surely feel compelled to start at the inception …

The Dreamthief's Daughter, by Michael Moorcock, Warner Books hardcover, $24.95. This is the first new novel of The Eternal Champion in more than a decade! An incredible story of The Counts of Bek, Hitler, collectors of powerful artifacts, and the battle for enchanted swords called "Ravenbrand" and "Stormbringer." Count Ulric (the last Graf von Bek) v. Gaynor the Damned. The control of the soul-stealing sword at the crux of the battle. A gripping and ambitious tale combining Fantasy, Sci Fi, history, and Hell, and the beautiful Dreamthief's daughter called Oona.

The Art of Rowena, with text by Doris Vallejo, Paper Tiger hardcover, $29.95. The fairytale worlds and sensuous creatures of Rowena Morrill are collected in the pages of this exquisite book of Fantasy art. Discover within the Crimson Demon and the "Yab Yum" position, an erotic painting entitled *The Gate*. mermaids and lava pits, hauntings, mythical renderings, beasts both terrible and beautiful as well as fire and ice. Rowena says in the Epilogue that for her, "art is an escape. No matter where my body is, I can always take my mind on an adventure. …" Such is the nature of this book. One cannot resist escaping, albeit briefly, from the real world we inhabit and into the mesmerizing world of Rowena's talent and imagination.

The Grimmage Cup, by Carol Kendall, An Odys-sey/ Harcourt Young Classic hardcover, $17.00. The re-release of this classic is a must- read for young adults and their parents alike. A charming pre-Harry Potter-mania tale of the Minnipins. Kendall has said of her preferred readers, children, "Children are a marvelous audience … they remember what they have read! Sometimes they remember it all their lives!" Certainly Muggles, Gummy the Poet, and Walter the Earl will charm and delight. A horrible war against "The Hairless Ones," unlikely heroes, and a band of banished Minnipins comprise this Newbery Award winner. A sequel entitled "The Whisper of Glocken" follows this tale. Marvelous book jacket illustration by the Brothers Hildebrandt. ❧

most terrifying when he smiles at you with pleased benignity.

Of course I have no intention at all of going into the actual plot save to tell you from the bottom of my heart that it is a wowser which never lets up through all three books running and one which I guarantee will keep you turning pages at any reading session way past the time you intended. You will gasp in horror; there are scenes that will break your heart; you will be amazed again and again, and—you will be shocked.

It is only fair to warn you of that last because in large part Pullman's writing of *His Dark Materials* is an angry reaction to C.S. Lewis and his tales of *Narnia*. It is his firm contention that the teachings in those stories are wrong and that they are disrespectful to life, and he does not pussyfoot about it in the slightest.

In this trilogy, God turns out to be very much not what he appears—I am not spoiling the plot of *The Amber Spyglass* by telling this to you for it is revealed to the reader within the earliest pages—and the whole notion of heaven is most seriously examined. At one point we hear a very important character come out and say it as clearly as Pullman can have her put it: "The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all."

So if that would spoil these three books for you then you'd best not so much as pick up volume 1.

But if you don't, you'll be missing a hell of a wonderful read

I have read and enjoyed some of Tim Powers' novels in the past (though I confess to missing *Last Call* which was the one just prior to *Declare)* and enjoyed them, but it seems to me that in ***Declare*** *(William Morrow, NYC; hardcover; 517 pp.; $25.00)* he's managed a new coming together of the parts, joined everything with a perfected solidity, and got the circuitry flowing with a whole new strength and force.

In the handout sent along with the book by the publishers Powers mentions the two main inspirations for *Declare* and they are his abiding enjoyment of and affection for John LeCarré's espionage fiction and his recent reading of a biography of the legendary spy Kim Philby (which had a foreword by LeCarré) who, in being simultaneously the head of counterespionage for the British Secret Service and a loyal spy for Russia's KGB, functioned as perhaps the most spectacularly successful double agent in the history of modern spookdom!

I am certainly glad Powers encountered these things as they have conspired to inspire him to write a marvelously wacky and entertaining Fantasy thriller which strikes off jauntily and very effectively into rich new territory up to now unexplored.

The book is formatted so that the action jumps unpredictably and disconcertingly—I am sure on purpose—to various time periods in Andrew Hale's career as a spy which would, if you sorted it out into chronological order, officially begin in 1927 when, at the age of seven and directly after he'd had his first Holy Communion, his very much more than slightly mysterious mother drove him from the quiet little Cotswold village of Chipping Campden —which was where he had grown up and which was pretty much all he knew in this world so far—to Whitehall Court, London and the odd, old building housing Great Britain's Secret Intelligence Service Headquarters.

Once there he is introduced to his godfather, Special Operative Executive James Theodora, who guides both mother and son through the twisting stairways and other surreal intricacies of the hoary structure to the office of a bristly, scary man known as "C" who, immediately after welcoming the boy, very seriously asks him if he is able to kill—by means of mental powers—a spider sitting on a web in the corner of one of his office windows. Only mildly disappointed when he sees that the child is unable to accomplish this, "C" then proceeds to solemnly instruct young Andrew to always remember his dreams, clumsily attempts to interest the lad in shortwave radio, and then terminates their strange yet peculiarly portentous interview by telling the awed seven-year-old not to worry since: "You're on our rolls."

Of course I was delighted with this wittily bizarre episode but I was also concerned since it set a very high standard and many a time I have had my expectations raised by the bright beginnings of some book only to see them subsequently dashed. I need not have worried myself in this case: *Declare* not only fully meets the challenge of its highly promising commencement, it keeps the level up throughout and actually ends by managing to top the reader's fondest hopes; or at least it did mine.

The plot of the book is dazzlingly fantastic, involving as it does an unholy joining together of unabashed Arabian Nights mythology with a gloriously paranoid exploration of how a horrendous occult maneuver by the Russians forced the postwar Allies to join against them in the recent Cold War, a struggle which up until now has been completely misread by the populace at large as a mere political conflict.

The unabashed grotesqueness of what actually did happen as revealed in *Declare* is so extreme in fact I think I shall cleverly avoid both prosecution under the Official Secrets Act and spoiling the reader's fun by tip-toeing round the horror at its core and instead rattle off a list of some of the minor if thoroughly appalling manifestations involved, such as the bubbling monstrosity in the Ash Shaq valley near the Saudi border, or the huge black basalt torsos floating over their wells in the city of Wabar lost in the desert of Rub' al-Khali (not to mention the mad, ossifying King of that place), or the great and awful being which was dragged across Berlin's Potsdamer Platz Square in a boat loaded with badly gnawed corpses and mounted on a flatbed truck so that it might behold the completion of the Wall set up to divide that city.

I realize even that list of hints could possibly create the impression that the singular doings in *Declare* might be more than ordinarily difficult for even a hardened reader of Fantasy to swallow, but Powers has very cleverly mounted them in a marvelously convincing world of espionage gaudily inhabited by weird but totally believable spies and other dubious types, including some who have since become spectacularly well known such as Kim Philby (who is so fantastically well drawn that when you have finished the book you will feel that you've actually met that amazingly complicated bastard!) and Guy Burgess and others like the above-mentioned James Theodora, who may be entirely fictitious yet are real enough to have no problems at all in making legions of demons and diverse monsters entirely credible.

The tale is given yet more plausibility by the slow and extremely difficult unfolding of a lovely romance between Andrew and the beautiful Elena Ceniza-Bendiga. It begins when they are assigned one another as very young and ironically innocent fellow operatives in Nazi-occupied Paris, then it wanders through the years all over Europe and the rest of the world, and I sincerely hope it's still going on since the two sweet if deadly creatures are absolutely made for each other, and very skillfully, too.

I declare that *Declare* is in every way a grand entertainment and am happy to confess I can't wait to read what Mr. Powers comes up with next!

I'm happy to report that someone had the excellent notion of rescuing a varied batch of Brian Lumley's short stories which have previously appeared in anthologies or magazines or a combination of both and then long since gone out of print. That same someone (or maybe someone else—you never know!) then noticed that left a gap toward the end of the volume and came up with the inspiration of rescuing a whole short novel which had been serialized in a now-defunct magazine and adding it on. The result is ***The Whisperer and Other Voices*** *(Tor Books, NYC; hardcover; 333 pp.; $24.95),* as cozy a book of horrors as could be wished for and the whole thing can be read—I tried it and it's true—in one rainy day with plenty of time for nibbling on snacks as you're doing it.

The stories are a varied bunch and range from the grisly shockers which Lumley does with such style to interesting experiments not at all so typical. There is, for instance, a gentle little morality tale on the tricky complications of sexual magic called "The Luststone," which anyone contemplating fooling around with rune-inscribed monoliths would be well advised to study; an amusing and affectionate *homage* to dear old R. Chetwynd-Hayes is given the appropriately Gothic title, "The Dis-

P.C. Hodgell's *Seeker's Mask*
April 2001 528 pages
ISBN 1-892065-34-7 $18

"If you remember, the last time we saw Jame, she had finally tracked down her twin brother Tori and now had to find a place for herself among the Kencyrs, those warrior-magicians she'd been searching for throughout the previous books. *Seeker's Mask* opens with the unruly Jame trying to fit into the constricting life found within the Women's Halls at Gothregor. Knowing Jame as we do, we also know it's a lost cause: in no time at all, she has set the quiet Women's Halls topsy-turvy, though it's not entirely her fault.

Pat Hodgell is one of the original voices and great talents of our field, and I couldn't happier to see her work back in print once more, with at least a fourth novel scheduled to appear in the future. If you're new to her work, get comfortable and allow a master storyteller to take you in hand. If you're already familiar with Jame's adventures, I hope you'll enjoy revisiting these stories as much as I have."—From the introduction by Charles de Lint.

www.Meisha

Lee Killough's *Blood Games*
May 2001 400 pages
ISBN 1-892065-41-X

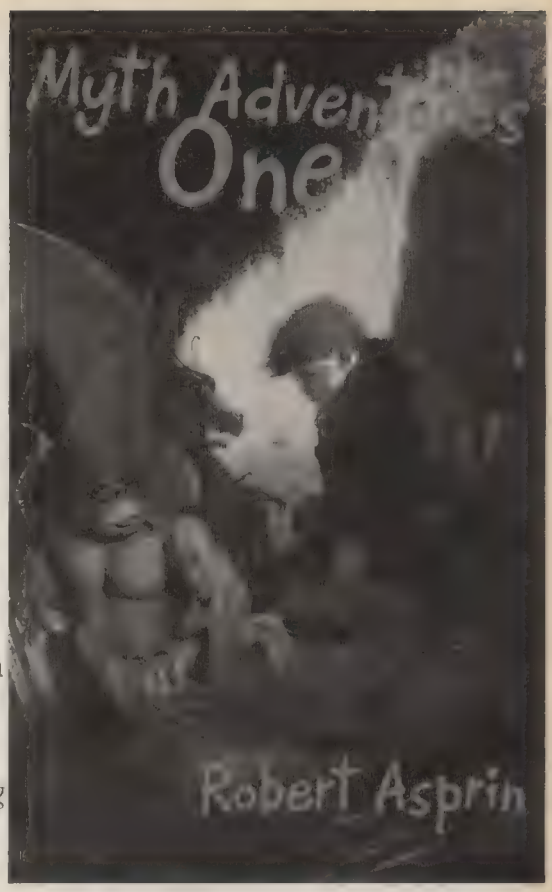
In 1996 Meisha Merlin introduced you to Garreth Mikaelian, police dective and vampire, in Lee Killough's omnibus reprint, *BloodWalk*. Now in her first new novel in over a decade Lee once again takes us into Garreth's world, as he finds out he has an enemy that he never suspected...Time. Garreth thought he knew all about being a vampire. After all, he has had fifteen years in the life to learn. But now he discovers that while Time ignores him, he cannot ignore it. Garreth finds himself in a race against time to divine if the leader of an enemy trio is the vampire he appears to be.

"Killough can be looked to for surprises in plot."—***Library Journal***

"A fine blend of mystery and the supernatural. Who says you can't do anything original with the vampire story?"—***S.F. Chronicle***

"Lee Killough is eminitly successful, both on the believability scale and in providing a quality mystery. In a word, wonderful."—*The Drood Review of Mystery*

Robert Asprin's *Myth Adventures One*
May 2001 360 pages
ISBN 1-89065-36-3 $16



Meisha Merlin is happy to announce the return of Robert Asprin and his magnificent *Myth Adventures* series. We will be reprinting all ten of the original titles in five two-volume omnibuses. The first omnibus, entitled *Myth Adventures One,* will include the first two books, *Another Fine Myth* and *Myth Conceptions.* Besides creating a new full color cover for each volume, Daniel R. Horne has agreed to do six full page B&W illustrations for each volume.

"A hilarious bit of froth and frolic"—*Library Journal.*

"Asprin's major achievement as a writer—brisk pacing, wit, and a keen satirical eye."—*Booklist*

"Witty, humorous, a pleasant antidote to ponderous fantasy."—*Amazing*

"These novels by Asprin are loads of fun."—*The Comic Buyer's Guide*

Merlin.com

Edo van Belkom's *Teeth*
May 2001 300 pages
ISBN 1-892065-37-1 $14

"[It is not known] for its toothsome smile. Not for the size or sharpness of its fangs. Neither is it known for the whiteness of its pearly whites. Rather for their unusual location. It is undoubtedly because of my beast and its teeth that Edo felt I should write this introduction. Because he has created a monster, too. I won't tell you much about it. Let you find out in the course of reading the novel itself. I'll tell you one thing, though. In case you haven't already figured it out. Edo's monster has *teeth.* Its teeth, like those of my own beast, are in an unusual and rather distressing location. They're white. They're sharp. And they bite."

—from the introduction by Richard Laymon

"Teeth will haunt you for the rest of your life."—Robert J. Sawyer

"Nice girls don't bite, unless they have to."—P. D. Cacek

"van Belkom is a down-to-earth, old-fashioned storyteller."—*Tesseracts*

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approval of Jeremy Cleave" and which, Lumley admits in his Introduction, was sufficiently spooky to manage to give its own author a bit of a turn one twilight eve; and "The Whisperer," which I'm glad to see back in print as it's always been one of my favorites among his short tales.

The bulk of the book is taken up with a short novel called *The Return of the Deep Ones* and it is a fine, totally unabashed Lumley tribute to H.P. Lovecraft's beloved *Weird Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Of course it has all the Deep Ones you could possibly hope for and is otherwise packed full of watery horrors.

The novel starts with the mysterious sending of a strange conch shell curling weirdly widdershins to a widowed scholar of oceanography living in Cornwall, moves smartly along to a sexy encounter with a seductive beauty able to swim underwater for oddly long lengths of time, and in no time at all we find ourselves visiting a very, very private boating club located not far from Newquay whose membership seems to consist entirely of odd folk with round, staring eyes and ascots tied high up on the neck as one might do if trying to hide vestigial gills.

My favorite among the regulars by far is a delightful old froggish fellow who has a hobby of building exquisite little models of undersea settlements such as *R'lyeh* and *Y'ha-Nthlei*. I yearn to fondle them. Of course there is no lack of terrifying volumes on the premises including one new to me named *Untersee Kulten* by Graf Grauberg. I really must try and track that one down.

All of this is great fun and I enjoyed it mightily on that rainy day—along with the pretzels and fish dip—but suddenly I found myself confronted with *Chapter 6* which concerns the sinister doings of Richard Haggopian, "the world's greatest authority in ichthyology and oceanography, to say nothing of all the many allied sciences and subjects" and, though it relates smoothly to the surrounding novel, it is actually a short story of its own concerning a brilliant if arrogant scientist's increasingly involved encounter with a gigantic hagfish which took my mind entirely off the fish dip, the cozy, rainy day, and everything else save for the tale's relentless and horrendous unfoldment. This little beauty is worth the price of the book all by itself, folks.

But I strongly suggest that if you do decide to read it that you forgo the fish dip and have Salsa with your chips!

Dark Terrors 5: The Gollancz Book of Horror (*edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton; Gollancz, London; 562 pp.; pounds 12.99)* is, as its title clearly indicates, the fifth in this series of really first-rank annual anthologies of Horror edited by Jones and Sutton, but it is also by far the largest to date as the publishers have generously agreed to allow the editors, starting with this collection, to double the size of the book.

Now, even more than in the prior volumes, we are fortunate enough to have a delicious embarrassment of riches with 31 stories written by such leading luminaries of the skillfully horrific as Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Gwyneth Jones, David J. Schow, and Peter Straub, and every one of them in top form.

These collections have always been something to anticipate eagerly but now that they're going to be of this marvelous mammoth capacity they'll be even more reminiscent of those lovely huge old collections of yesteryear—so it looks as if the world isn't going to pot after all.

Very encouraging. Very encouraging indeed!

Gahan Wilson

The recipe for ***Moonlight*** (*by Susan Dexter; Wildside Press, NJ; trade paper; 128 pp.; $12.95),* an uncluttered, affectingly simple fable is straightforward: Take one adolescent wizard's apprentice, add an independent-minded cat, a clumsily trapped unicorn, and a strange eclipse of the Moon; stir with comic strokes; compound until a moral crisis is reached; then resolve into a realistic victory. Serves young and old alike.

In the realm of Calandra, young Tristan, apprentice to the hedge-wizard Blais, is pretty small potatoes. Teenage-awkward in both limbs and spell-casting, Tristan is on the point of giving up his chosen career. When he adopts a stray cat named Thomas (or does Thomas adopt him?), then finds out that Master Blais will not permit the animal to stay, Tristan is thrown into further despondency. But the chain of absurd events that swiftly follows in a comic jumble soon leads Tristan to a new revelation about his future. Blais leaves for a short trip; a fox eats the household's chickens; Tristan can get a single replacement hen from a neighbor in exchange for some bees; the boy ventures into the woods to find a cooperative swarm; lost in a bog he stumbles upon a trapped unicorn; saving the unicorn, he must then lose him. But what he gains in return is his salvation and a new assurance.

Dexter deftly concatenates all these forwant-of-a-nail incidents into something inevitable. Her delicate restraint—no grandiose characterizations, magic, or symbolism—delivers a soft-spoken, low-key adventure, where natural observations play as large a part as any cosmic matters. Thomas the cat, who speaks mind-to-mind with Tristan, proves a charming fellow, and his pivotal role emerges as a real surprise.

This well-done, low-key tale provides a palate-cleansing break from many other more aggressive, melodramatic opuses.

Contact Wildside Press for this title and the one below at www.wildsidepress.com or P.O. Box 45, Gillette, NJ 07933.

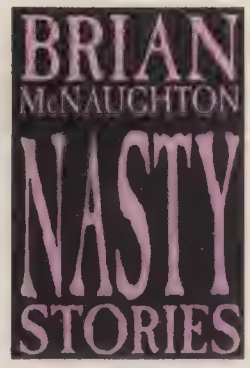
No one can accuse Brian McNaughton of false advertising when comparing the title of his collection to its contents. These stories—some just a couple of pages long—are truly

nasty, in the good-bad sense of the word. The tales in ***Nasty Stories*** *(Wildside Press, NJ; trade paper; 156 pp.; $14.95)* share a Grand Guignol approach, reveling in macabre twists, evil endings, cosmic injustices, human perversions, gleeful mockery, unholy retributions,

and inexplicable dooms. And yet, and yet—there's something reassuringly moral and cathartic about these gutsy stories. Like Mark McLaughlin, McNaughton seems to declare, "Look at the worst I can imagine—with my wormy tongue partially protruding straight through my decayed cheek—and you'll find that you can withstand such sights, and emerge stronger." It's a rather stern and unforgiving philosophy, leavened by black humor, but for many readers, this might very well be just their chosen tonic.

Several stories ("The Conversion of St. Mon-ocarp," "Interrupted Pilgrimage," and "Water and the Spirit") deal with the medieval barbarities of one Heinrich von der Hiedlerheim, a brutal ruler who frequently tangles with supernatural forces. Many of the stories take place in contemporary settings, where even such innocent acts as drilling a peephole through the wall of a woman's cabana can result in doom ("The Hole"). A couple creatively reinterpret the Chthulu Mythos ("The Dunwich Lodger," "Herbert West—Reincarnated"). And in a short-short like "The Star Stalker," McNaughton cleverly inverts clichés, a ploy he's find of, which proves that none of his gruesome episodes arise without a lot of thought and attention given to what really disturbs us—and how to conquer our fears.

I've been enjoying the fiction of S.P. Somtow since his debut in the early 1980s, when his byline was Somtow Sucharitikul, and he was penning frothy and amusing tales about a satellite called Mallworld for the pages of *Asimov's*. Since then, with the name change, he's trafficked more in dark Fantasy and Horror, and ***Tagging the Moon*** *(Night Shade Books, CA; hardcover; 277 pp.; $25.00)*, a collection of 10 tales—subtitled "Fairy Tales from L.A."—works that vein deeply. Like the McNaughton stories, these modern fables generally involve the seamier side of life, with bad apples infecting any good ones in the moldy barrel of suffering existence. But Somtow is a much more mannered, polished, and elegant writer than McNaughton, and while his tales carry as much visceral impact, they're cloaked in velvet.



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Continued on page 78

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What immortal hand or eye
framed thy
fearful symmetry?

What the TYGER Told Her

By Kage Baker
Illustration by Mark Harrison

"You must observe carefully," said the tyger.

He was an old tyger. He had survived in captivity more years than he might have been expected to, penned in his narrow iron run in such a cold wet country, in all weathers. He was just the color of toast, and white underneath like bread too. His back was double-striped with black streaks, and the rippling shadows of the bars as he paced continually, turn and turn again.

The little girl blinked, mildly surprised at being addressed. She had a round face, pale and freckled like a robin's egg. She had been squatting beside the tyger's pen for some minutes, fascinated by him. If anyone had seen her crouched there, crumpling the silk brocade of her tiny hooped gown, she'd have been scolded, for the summer dust was thick in the garden. But no one had noticed she was there.

"Power," said the tyger, "comes from knowledge, you see. The best way to learn is to watch what happens. The best way to watch is unseen. Now, in my proper place, which is jungle meadow and forest canes, I am very nearly invisible. That," and he looked with eyes green as beryls at the splendid house rising above the gardens, "is your proper place. Are you invisible there?"

The little girl nodded her head.

"Do you know why you're invisible?"

She thought about it. "Because John and James were born."

"Your little brothers, yes. And so nobody sees you now?"

"And because …" The child waved her hand in a gesture that took in the house, the garden, the menagerie, and the immense

park in which they were set. "There's so many uncles and people here. Mamma and I used to live in the lodging house. Papa would come upstairs in his uniform. It was red. He was a poor officer. Then he got sick and lived with us in his nightgown. It was white. He would drink from a bottle and shout, and I would hide behind the chair when he did. And John and James got born. And Papa went to heaven. And Mamma said oh, my dear, whatever shall we do?"

"What *did* you do?" the tyger prompted.

"I didn't do anything. But Grandpapa forgave Mamma and sent for us."

"What had your Mamma done, to be forgiven?"

"She wasn't supposed to marry Papa because she is," and the child paused a moment to recollect the big words, "an indigent tradesman's daughter. Papa used to tell her so when he drank out of the bottle. But when she had John and James, that made it all right again, because they're the only boys."

"So they're important."

"They will inherit it all," the child explained, as though she were quoting. "Because Papa died and Uncle John is in India, and Uncle Thomas only has Louise."

"But they haven't inherited yet."

"No. Not until Grandpapa goes to heaven."

"Something to think about, isn't it?" said the tyger, lowering his head to lap water from his stone trough.

The little girl thought about it.

"I thought Grandpapa was in heaven when we went to see him," she said. "We climbed so many stairs. And the bed was so high and white and the pillows like clouds. Grandpapa's nightgown was white. He has white hair and a long, long beard. He shouted like Papa did. Mamma turned away crying. Mr. Lawyer said It's only his pain, Mrs. Edgecombe. Uncle Thomas said Dear sister, come and have a glass of cordial. So she did and she was much better."

"But nobody saw *you* there, did they?"

"No," said the child.

"Who's that coming along the walk?" the tyger inquired.

"That is Uncle Thomas and Aunt Caroline," the child replied.

"Do you notice that she's not as pretty as your Mamma?"

"Yes."

"And quite a bit older."

"Yes. And she can't have any children but Cousin Louise."

"I think perhaps you ought to sit quite still," advised the tyger.

The woman swept ahead in her anger, long skirts trailing in the tall summer grass at the edge of the walk, white fingers knotting on her lace apron, high curls bobbing with her agitation. The man hurried after her, tottering a little because of the height of his heels, and the skirts of his coat flapped out behind him. He wore bottle-green silk. His waistcoat was embroidered with little birds, his wig was slightly askew. He looked sullen.

"Oh, you have a heart of stone," cried Aunt Caroline. "Your own child to be left a pauper! It's too unjust. Is this the reward of filial duty?"

"Louise is not an especially dutiful girl," muttered Uncle Thomas.

"I meant your filial duty! One is reminded of the Prodigal Son. *You* have obeyed his every wish, while he thundered up there. Wretched old paralytic! And Robert disgraces himself, and dies like a dog in a ditch with that strumpet, but all's forgiven because of the twins. Are all our hopes to be dashed forever?"

"Now, Caroline, patience," said Uncle Thomas. "Consider: Life's uncertain."

"That's true." Aunt Caroline pulled up short, looking speculative. "Any childish illness might carry off the brats. Oh, I could drown them like puppies myself!"

Uncle Thomas winced. He glared at Aunt Caroline's back a moment before drawing abreast of her, by which time he was smiling.

"You'll oblige me by doing nothing so rash. Robert was never strong; we can pray they've inherited his constitution. And after all it would be just as convenient, my dear, if the wench were to die instead. I would be guardian of John and James, the estate in my hands; what should we have to worry about then?"

They walked on together. The little girl stared after them.

"Do you think they're going to drown my Mamma?" she asked uneasily.

"Did you see the way your uncle looked at your aunt behind her back?" replied the tyger. "I don't think he cares for her, particularly. What do *you* think?"

There were fruit trees espaliered all along the menagerie wall, heavy now in apricots and cherries, and when the chimpanzee had been alive it had been driven nearly frantic in summers by the sight and the smell of the fruit. Now stuffed with straw, it stared sadly from a glass-fronted cabinet, through a fine layer of dust.

The little girl, having discovered the fruit was there, wasted no time in filling her apron with all she could reach and retiring to the shade under the plum tree. The largest, ripest apricot she bowled carefully into the tyger's cage. The others she ate in methodical fashion, making a small mound of neatly stacked pits and cherry stones.

The tyger paused in his relentless stride just long enough to sniff the apricot, turning it over with his white-bearded chin.

"Your baby brothers have not died," he said.

"No," the little girl affirmed, biting into a cherry.

"However, your Aunt Caroline has been suffering acute stomach pains, especially after dinner. That's interesting."

"She has a glass of port wine to make it better," said the child. "But it doesn't get better."

"And that's your Mamma coming along the walk now, I see," said the tyger. "With Uncle Thomas."

The child concealed the rest of the fruit with her apron and sat still. She needn't have worried: Neither her mother nor her uncle noticed her.

Like her daughter, Mamma had a pale, freckled face but was otherwise quite attractive, and the black broadcloth of her mourning made her look slender and gave her a dignity she needed, for she was very young. She was being drawn along by Uncle Thomas, who had her by the arm.

"We ought never to question the will of the Almighty," Uncle Thomas was saying pleasantly. "It never pleased Him that Caroline should bear me sons, and certainly that's been a grief to me; but then, without boys of my own, how ready am I to do a father's duty by dear little John and James! All that I might have done for my sons, I may do for yours. Have no fear on that account, dear Lavinia."

"It's very kind of you, brother Thomas," said Mamma breathlessly. "For, sure we have been so poor, I was at my wit's end—and father Edgecombe is so severe."

"But Robert was his favorite," said Uncle Thomas. "The very reason he disowned him, I think; Father couldn't brook disobedience in one he loved above all. If Henry or I had eloped, he'd have scarcely noticed. And Randall does what he likes, of course. Father was too hard on Robert, alas."

"Oh, sir, I wish someone had said so while he lived," said Mamma. "He often wept that he had no friends."

"Alas! I meant to write to him, but duty forbid." Uncle Thomas shook his head. "It is too bad. I must endeavor to redress it, Lavinia."

He slipped his arm around her waist. She looked flustered, but said nothing. They walked on.

"Mamma is frightened," said the child.

"There are disadvantages to being pretty," said the tyger. "As you can see. I imagine she wishes she could be invisible, occasionally. Your uncle's a subtle man; notice how he used words like *duty* and *alas*. No protestations of ardent passion. It's often easier to get something you want if you pretend you don't want it. Remember that."

The little girl nodded.

She ate another cherry. A peahen ventured near the wall, cocking her head to examine the windfall fruit under the little trees. As she lingered there, a peacock came stalking close, stiffened to see the

hen; his whole body, bright as blue enamel, shivered, and his trailing train of feathers rose and spread behind him, shimmering in terrifying glory. Eyes stared from it. The little girl caught her breath at all the green and purple and gold.

"You mustn't allow yourself to be distracted," the tyger cautioned. "It's never safe. You see?"

"What, are you lurking there, you little baggage?"

The little girl looked around sharply, craning her head back. Uncle Randall dropped into a crouch beside her, staring at her. He was young, dressed in tawny silk that shone like gold. His voice was teasing and hard. He smelled like wine.

"Ha, she's stealing fruit! You can be punished for that, you know. They'll pull your skirt up and whip your bare bum, if I tell. Shall I tell?"

"No," said the child.

"What'll you give me, not to tell?"

She offered him an apricot. He took it and rolled it in his hand, eyeing it, and hooted in derision.

"Gives me the greenest one she's got! Clever hussy. You're a little woman, to be sure."

She didn't know what to say to that, so she said nothing. He stared at her a moment longer, and then the tyger drew his attention.

"Aren't you afraid of old Master Stripes? Don't you worry he'll break his bounds, and eat you like a rabbit? He might, you know. But I'm not afraid of him."

The tyger growled softly, did not cease pacing.

"Useless thing! I'd a damn sight rather Johnnie'd sent us one of his blacks," said Uncle Randall. He looked down at her again. "Well, poppet. What's your Mamma's favorite color?"

"Sky blue," said the child.

"It is, eh? Yes, with those eyes, she'd wear that to her advantage. D'you think she'd like a velvet scarf in that color, eh? Or a cape?"

"She has to wear black now," the child reminded him.

"She'll wear it as long as it suits her, I've no doubt. What about scent? What's her fancy? Tell me, does she ever drink strong waters in secret?"

The child had no idea what that meant, so she shook her head mutely. Uncle Randall snorted.

"You wouldn't tell if she did, I'll wager. Well. Does she miss your Papa very much?"

"Yes."

"You must say 'Yes, Uncle dear.'"

"Yes, Uncle dear."

"There's a good girl. Do you think you'd like to have another Papa?"

The child thought about it. Remembering the things Papa had said when he raved, that had made her creep behind the chair to hide, she said: "No."

"No? But that's wicked of you, you little minx. A girl must have a Papa to look after her and her Mamma, or dreadful things might happen. They might starve in the street. Freeze to death. Meat for dogs, you see, do you want your Mamma to be meat for dogs?"

"No," said the child, terrified that she would begin to cry.

"Then you'll tell her she must get you another Papa as soon as ever she may," Uncle Randall ordered. "Do you understand me? Do it, and you'll have a treat. Something pretty." He reached down to stroke her cheek, and his hand lingered there.

"What a soft cheek you've got," he said. "I wonder if your Mamma's is as soft."

The peacock was maneuvering up behind the hen, treading on her feathers. Seeing it, Uncle Randall gave a sharp laugh and shied the apricot at her, and she bolted forward, away from the peacock.

Uncle Randall strode off without another word.

"Now, your Uncle Randall," said the tyger, "is not a subtle man. Nor as clever as he thinks he is, all in all. He talks far too much, wouldn't you say?"

The child nodded.

"He uses fear to get what he wants," said the tyger. "And he underestimates his opponents. That's a dangerous thing to do. A bad combination of strategies."

Wasps buzzed and fought for the apricot at his feet.

THE SUMMER HEAT WAS OPPRESSIVE. ALL THE EARLY FRUIT HAD FALLEN from the trees, or been gathered and taken in to make jam. There were blackberries in the hedge, gleaming like red and black garnets, but they were dusty and hard for the child to reach without scratching herself on the brambles.

There was a thick square of privet in the center of the menagerie courtyard, man-high. Long ago it had been a formal design, clipped close, but for one reason or another had been abandoned to grow unchecked. Its little paths were all lost now except at ground level, where they formed a secret maze of tunnels in the heart of the bush. There was a sundial buried in the greenery, lightless and mute: It told nobody anything.

The little girl had crawled in under the branches and lay there, pretending she was a jungle beast hiding in long grass. She gazed out at the tyger, who had retreated to the shade of the sacking the grooms had laid across the top of his pen. He blinked big mild eyes. He looked sleepy.

"How fares your Aunt Caroline?" he inquired.

"She's sick," the child said. "The doctor was sent for, but he couldn't find anything wrong with her. He said it might be her courses drying up."

"Do you know what that means?"

"No," said the child. "But that's what Uncle Thomas is telling everybody. And he says, you mustn't mind what a woman says because of it. He's very kind to her."

"How clever of him." The tyger yawned, showing fearful teeth, and stretched his length. "And he's even kinder to your Mamma, isn't he?"

"Yes. Very kind."

"What do you suppose will happen if your Aunt Caroline dies?"

"She will be buried in the graveyard."

"So she will."

They heard footsteps approaching, two pairs.

The child peered up from under the leaves and saw Cousin Louise with one of the stableboys. She was a tall girl with a sallow com-

"POWER COMES FROM KNOWLEDGE, YOU SEE. THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS TO WATCH WHAT HAPPENS. THE BEST WAY TO WATCH IS UNSEEN."

plexion, very tightly laced into her gown in order to have any bosom at all. The stableboy was thickset, with pimples on his face. He was carrying a covered pail. He smelled like manure.

"It be under here," he said, leading Cousin Louise around the side of the privet square. "The heart of it's all hollow, you see? And you can lie inside in the shade. It's a rare nice place to hide, and there ain't nobody knows it's here but me."

"Audacious rogue!" Cousin Louise giggled. "I'll tear my gown."

"Then the Squire'll buy thee a new one, won't he? Get in there."

The child lay very still. She heard the branches parting and the sound of two people awkwardly arranging themselves inside the privet. Turning her head very slightly, she caught a glimpse of them six feet away from her, mostly screened off by green leaves and the base of the sundial. She watched from the corner of her eye as they made themselves comfortable, handing the pail back and forth to drink from it.

"Aah! I like a cool drop of beer, in this heat," the stableboy sighed.

"It's refreshing," said Cousin Louise. "I've never had beer before."

"Like enough you wouldn't," said the stableboy, and belched. "Sweet wines and gin, ain't that what the fine folk have to themselves? The likes of me don't get a taste of your Madeira from one year's end to the next." He chuckled. "That's all one; I'll get a taste of something fine anyway."

There was a thrashing of bushes and Cousin Louise gave a little squeal of laughter.

"Hush! The keeper'll hear, you silly slut."

"No, no, he mustn't."

There was heavy breathing and a certain ruffling, as of petticoats. Cousin Louise spoke in an almost trancelike voice.

"How if you were a bold highwayman? You might shoot the driver, and there might be no other passengers but me, and I might be cowering within the coach, in fear of my very life. You'd fling the door wide—and you might look at me and lick your chops, as a hungry dog might—and you might say—you'd say—"

"Here's a saucy strumpet wants a good futtering, I'd say," growled the stableboy.

"Yes," Cousin Louise gasped, hysteria coming into her voice, "and I'd protest, but you would be merciless. You'd drag me from the coach, and throw me down on the ferns in the savage forest, and tear my gown to expose my bosom, and then—"

"Oh, hush your noise," the stableboy told Cousin Louise, and crawled on top of her. When they'd finished, he rolled off and reached for the beer pail. Cousin Louise was laughing, breathless, helpless, but her laughter began to sound a little like crying, and a certain alarm was in the stableboy's voice when he said: "Stop your fool mouth! Do you want to get me whipped? If you start screaming I'll cut your throat, you jade! What's the matter with you?"

Cousin Louise put her hands over her face and fell silent, attempting to even her breath. "Nothing," she said faintly. "Nothing. All's well."

There was silence for a moment, and the stableboy drank more beer.

"I feel a little ill with the heat," explained Cousin Louise.

"That's like enough," said the stableboy, sounding somewhat mollified.

Another rustling; Cousin Louise was sitting up, putting her arms around the stableboy.

"I do love you so," she said, "I could never see you harmed, dearest. Say but the word and I'll run away with thee, and be thy constant wife."

"Art thou mad?" The stableboy sounded incredulous. "The likes of you wedded to me? The Squire'd hunt us sure, and he'd have my life. Even so, how should I afford to keep a wife, with my place lost? It ain't likely you'd bring much of a dowry, anyhow, be the Squire never so willing. Not with everything going to them little boys, now."

"I have three hundred pounds a year from my mother, once she's dead and I am married." Cousin Louise sounded desperate. "I have! And she's grievous sick. Who knows how long she will live?"

"And what then? Much good that'd do me, if I was hanged or transported," said the stableboy. "Which I will be, if you don't keep quiet about our fun. Better ladies than you knows how to hold their tongues."

Cousin Louise did not say another word after that. The stableboy drank the rest of the beer, and sighed.

"I've got the mucking out to do," he announced, and buttoned himself and crawled from the bush. His footsteps went away across the paving stones, slow and heavy.

Cousin Louise sat perfectly still for a long time, before abruptly scrambling out and walking away with quick steps.

The little girl exhaled.

"He didn't speak to her very nicely," said the tyger.

"No."

"And she didn't seem to have much fun. Why do you suppose she'd go into the bushes with a person like that?"

"She said she loved him," said the child.

"Does she?" The tyger licked his paw lazily. "I wonder. Some people seem to feel the need to get manure on their shoes."

The child wrinkled her nose. "Why?"

"Who knows? Perhaps they feel it's what they deserve," said the tyger.

THE LITTLE GIRL WATCHED THEM WARILY, NIBBLING ON A ROSE HAW FROM ONE OF THE CUT SPRAYS. THE TYGER WATCHED THEM TOO, PACING MORE QUICKLY THAN USUAL.

THE LITTLE GIRL HAD FOUND BROKEN CHINA HIDDEN IN THE GREEN gloom behind the potting shed: two dishes, a custard-cup and a sauceboat. She carried them out carefully and washed them in the horse-trough, and then retired to the bed of bare earth under the fruit trees with them. There she set out the broken plates to be courtyards, and inverted the cup and sauceboat on them to be houses. Collecting cherry pits, she arranged them in lines: They were soldiers, marching between the houses. The rationale for making them soldiers was that soldiers had red coats, and cherries were red. The tyger watched her.

"There are visitors today," he said. The child nodded.

"Uncle Henry and Aunt Elizabeth," she replied. "They came to see John and James. Uncle Henry is going to be their godfather, because he's a curate. They have a little girl, just my size, but she didn't come, or she might have played with me."

"Are you sorry she's not here to play with you?"

The child lifted her head in surprise, struck by the question.

"I don't know," she said. "Would she see me?"

"She might," the tyger said. "Children notice other children, don't they?"

"Sometimes."

"I think someone's coming," the tyger informed her. She looked up and saw Uncle Henry and Aunt Elizabeth strolling together along the walk.

"… not so well-stocked as it was formerly, alas," said Uncle Henry. He wore black, with a very white wig. Aunt Elizabeth was plump, wore a mulberry-colored gown and a straw hat for the sun.

"Oh, bless us, look there!" she exclaimed, stopping in her tracks as she saw the tyger. "Dear, dear, d'you think it's safe to keep a beast like that about, with so many little children in the house? I'm glad now we kept Jane at home, my love."

"He's never harmed anyone, that I'm aware," Uncle Henry told her, taking her arm and steering her forward. "Poor old Bobo used to scream, and bite, and fling ordure; but I daresay it was because Randall teased him. Randall was frightened of this fellow, however. Kept his distance."

"And very sensible of him too," said Aunt Elizabeth, shuddering. "Oh, look at the size of it! I feel like a mouse must feel before our Tibby."

"The same Providence created them, Bess." Uncle Henry stopped before the pen. "Each creature has its place in the grand design, after all."

"Tibby catches rats, and I'm sure that's very useful indeed, but what's the point of an animal like this one?" protested Aunt Elizabeth. "Great horrid teeth and claws! Unless they have giant rats in India?"

"I don't think they do," said Uncle Henry. "But I trust the Almighty had His reasons."

"Well, I shall never understand how He could make something so cruel," said Aunt Elizabeth firmly. "Look there, what are those? Are those parrots? Dear little things!"

"Budgerigars, I think," said Uncle Henry.

They walked away to inspect the aviary, which was beyond the privet square.

"Stay where you are," said the tyger.

"Oh, I could never," Mamma was saying distractedly. "I couldn't think of such a thing, with poor Robert's grave scarcely green."

"Tut-tut, Lavinia!" said Uncle Randall, as they approached. "There's none to hear but you and I. Look as pious as you like before the world. The demure widow, meek and holy, if you please! I won't repeat what passes between us; but you and I both knew Robert. He hadn't enough blood in him to keep you contented, a lively girl like you. Had he, now? How long's it been since you had a good gallop, eh? Eh?"

She had been walking quickly ahead of him, and he caught up to her in front of the tyger's pen and seized her arm. Her face was red.

"You don't—oh—"

Uncle Randall stepped close and spoke very quickly. "The blood in your cheeks is honest, Madam Sanctimony. Don't play the hypocrite with me! I know London girls too well. You got your hooks into Robert to climb out of the gutter, didn't you? Well, keep climbing, hussy! I stand ready to help you up the next step, and the old man may be damned. We've got those boys, haven't we? We'll be master and mistress here one day, if you're not an affected squeamish—"

"You hound!" Mamma found her voice at last. "Oh, you base—*thing*!"

Uncle Henry and Aunt Elizabeth came walking swiftly around the privet square, and advanced on the scene like a pair of soldiers marching.

"What's this, Lavinia?" Uncle Henry's eyes moved from Mamma to Uncle Randall and back. "Tears?"

"We were speaking of Robert," said Uncle Randall, standing his ground. "Poor fellow. Were we not, dear Lavinia?"

Shocked back into silence, Mamma nodded. Aunt Elizabeth came and put her arms about her.

"My child, you mustn't vex your heart so with weeping," she said solicitously. "It's natural, in such an affectionate match, but only think! Robert would wish you to be happy, now that all's reconciled. And you must have courage, for the children's sake."

"So I was just saying," said Uncle Randall, helping himself to a pinch of snuff.

"We must endure our sorrows in patience," Uncle Henry advised her, looking at Uncle Randall.

"Come now, Lavinia," said Uncle Randall in quite a kind voice. "Dry your tears and walk with us. Shall we go view the pretty babes? John's the very image of Robert, in my opinion."

They bore her away between them.

"Your Mamma doesn't wish to make trouble, I see," said the tyger.

"She didn't tell on him," said the child, in wonderment.

"Silence is not always wise," said the tyger. "Not when it gives your opponent an opportunity. Perhaps your Uncle Randall hasn't underestimated your Mamma, after all."

"Why didn't she tell on him?" The child stared after the retreating adults.

"Why indeed?" said the tyger. "Something else to remember: Even bad strategy can succeed, if your opponent has no strategy at all."

Just beyond the menagerie courtyard, five stone steps led down into a sunken garden. It was a long rectangle of lawn, with rose beds at its edges and a fountain and small reflecting pool at its center. At its far end five more stone steps led up out of it, and beyond was a dense wood, and farther beyond was open heath where deer sometimes grazed.

The roses were briary, and the fountain long clogged and scummed over with green. But there were men working on it today, poking with rakes and sticks, and it had begun to gurgle in a sluggish kind of way; and the gardener had cut back the briars that hung out over the lawn. He was up on a ladder now with his handkerchief, rubbing dust off the sprays of rose haws, so they gleamed scarlet as blood drops.

The little girl watched them warily, nibbling at a rose haw she'd snatched from one of the cut sprays. It was hard and sour, but interesting. The tyger watched them too, pacing more quickly than usual.

"Your Uncle Randall gave your mother a fine length of sky-blue silk," he said. "Will she have a gown made of it, do you think?"

"No," said the child. "She showed it to Uncle Thomas and Aunt Caroline and asked them if she ought to have a gown made for the christening party."

"Really?" the tyger said. "And what did they say?"

"Aunt Caroline looked cross, and said Mamma mustn't think of such a thing while she's in mourning. Uncle Thomas didn't say anything. But his eyes got very small."

"Rather a clever thing for your Mamma to have done," said the tyger. "What did she say in reply?"

"She said Yes, yes, you're quite right. And Uncle Thomas went and talked to Uncle Randall about it."

The tyger made a low percussive sound in his chest, for all the world like quiet laughter.

"If a rabbit's being chased by a fox, it's wise to run straight to the wolf," he said. "Of course, the question then is whether it can get away safely after the wolf's taken the fox by the throat. Wolves like a bit of rabbit too."

"It's bad to be a rabbit," said the little girl.

"So it is," said the tyger. "But if one has grown up to be a rabbit, one can do very little about it."

"Only run."

"Just so." The tyger turned his great wide head to regard the sunken garden. "Why, your aunts have come out to take the air."

The little girl retreated to the plum tree. Leaning against its trunk, she watched Aunt Caroline and Aunt Elizabeth coming along the walk.

Aunt Caroline was pale and thin, had a shawl draped about her shoulders, and Aunt Elizabeth half-supported her as she walked.

"Yes, I do think the bloom's returning to your cheeks already," Aunt Elizabeth was saying in a determinedly cheery voice. "Fresh air will do you a world of good, my dear, I'm sure. Whenever I feel faint or bilious at Brookwood, dearest Henry always advises me to take my bonnet and go for a ramble, and after a mile or so I'm always quite restored again, and come home with quite an appetite for my dinner!"

Aunt Caroline said nothing in reply, breathing with effort as they walked. There was a stone seat overlooking the sunken garden, and Aunt Elizabeth led her to it.

"We'll settle ourselves here, shall we, and watch them making it ready?" suggested Aunt Elizabeth, sitting down and making room for Aunt Caroline. "There now. Oh, look, they've got the water going again! Really, this will make the prettiest place for a party. You'll want to put the long table for the collation over there, I suppose, and the trestle tables along the other side. And I would, my dear, have two comfortable chairs brought down and set on a kind of step, 'tis called a dais in London I think, where the nursemaids may sit with the little boys and all may pay their respects conveniently."

Aunt Caroline hissed and doubled over, clutching herself.

"There, my dear, there, courage!" Aunt Elizabeth rubbed her back. "Oh, and you were feeling so much better after breakfast. Perhaps this will help. When I'm troubled with wind, Henry will—"

"It's a judgment from God," gasped Aunt Caroline.

"Dear, you mustn't say such a thing! It may be He sends us our little aches and pains to remind us we ought to be ready at all times to come before Him, but—"

"I prayed the boys would die," Aunt Caroline told her. "I thought of having them suffocated in their cradles. God forgive me, forgive me! And it wasn't a week after that the pains began."

Aunt Elizabeth had drawn away from her. Her face was a study in stupefied horror.

"Never!" she said at last. "Those dear, sweet little lambs? Oh, Caroline, you never! Oh, how could you? Oh, and to think—"

Aunt Caroline had begun to sob hoarsely, rocking herself to and fro in her agony. Aunt Elizabeth watched her a moment, struggling to find words, and at last found them.

"Well," she said, "It's—Henry would say, this is proof of the infinite mercy of the Almighty, you know. For, only think, if you had followed such a wicked thought with a *deed*, what worse torments would await you eternally! As it is, the sin is hideous but not so bad as it might be, and these timely pangs have made you reflect on the peril to your eternal soul, and you have surely repented! Therefore all may yet be well—"

Aunt Caroline toppled forward. Aunt Elizabeth leaped up, screaming, and the men stopped work at once and ran to be of assistance. Upon examination, Aunt Caroline was found not to have died, but merely fainted from her pain, and when revived she begged feebly to be taken to her chamber. Aunt Elizabeth, rising to the occasion, directed the men to improvise a stretcher from the ladder. She paced alongside as they bore Aunt Caroline away, entreating her to call on her Savior for comfort.

The little girl watched all this with round eyes.

"There's one secret out," remarked the tyger. "I wonder whether any others will show themselves?"

THE EAST WIND WAS BLOWING. IT SWAYED THE CLOTHS ON THE LONG tables, it swayed the paper lanterns the servants had hung up on lines strung through the trees in the garden. The tyger lashed his tail as he paced.

The little girl was walking from lantern to lantern, peering up at them and wondering how they would light when evening fell.

"Your Uncle Randall asked your Mamma to marry him today," said the tyger.

"He did it in front of Uncle Henry and Aunt Elizabeth," said the child.

"Because he thought she wouldn't like to say no, if they were present," said the tyger. The child nodded.

"But Mamma said no," she concluded. "Then Uncle Randall had a glass of wine."

The tyger put his face close to the bars.

"Something bad is going to happen," he said. "Think very hard, quickly: Are you a rabbit, or do you have teeth and claws?"

"What the hell's it doing?" said a hoarse voice from the other end of the courtyard. The child looked up to see Uncle Randall advancing on her swiftly. He had a strange blank look in his eyes, a strange fixed smile.

"Hasn't it ever been told not to go so near a wild brute? Naughty, naughty little thing!" he said, and grabbed her arm tightly. "We'll have to punish it."

He began to drag her away in the direction of the potting shed. She screamed, kicking him as hard as she could, but he laughed and swung her up off her feet. He marched on toward the thicket behind the shed, groping under her skirts.

"We'll have to punish its little soft bum, that's what we'll have to do," he said wildly, "Because a dutiful uncle must do such things, after all, ungrateful little harlot—"

She screamed again, and suddenly he had stopped dead in his tracks and let her fall, because Cousin Louise was standing right before them and staring at Uncle Randall. She was chalk-white. She seemed as though she were choking a long minute, unable to make a sound, as the little girl whimpered and scrambled away on hands and knees.

Uncle Randall, momentarily disconcerted, regained his smile.

"What?" he demanded. "None of your business if we were only playing."

Cousin Louise threw herself at him. Being, as she was, a tall girl, she bore him over so he fell to the pavement with a crash. His wig came off. She beat him in the face with her fists, and found her voice at last, harsh as a crow's:

"*What were you going to tell her?* Were you going to tell her you'd cut her tongue out if she ever told what you did? Were you? *Were you?*"

Uncle Randall snarled and attempted to throw her off.

"Ow! Who'd believe you, stupid bitch? The guests'll be arriving, I'll say you've gone mad—"

The child climbed to her feet and ran, sobbing, and got behind the menagerie wall. There she cried in silence, hiding her face in her skirts.

When she ventured out again at last, neither Uncle Randall nor Cousin Louise were anywhere in sight. The tyger was looking at her steadily.

"That's another secret come to light," he said. "Now, I'll tell you still another."

Rubbing her eyes with her fist, she listened as he told her the secret.

Mamma and Aunt Elizabeth carried the babies into the chapel, so the nurserymaid was able to spare her a moment.

"Lord, lord, how did your face get so dirty? As if I ain't got enough to see to!" she grumbled, dipping a corner of her apron in the horse-trough and washing the little girl's face. "Now, hold my hand and be a good child when we go in. No noise!"

She was a good child through the solemn ceremony. Mamma watched the little boys tenderly, anxiously, and Uncle Henry and Aunt Elizabeth smiled when first John, and then James, screamed and went red-faced at having Satan driven out with cold water. Uncle Thomas was watching Mamma. Aunt Caroline was tranquilly distant: she'd taken laudanum for her pain. Beside her, Cousin Louise watched Uncle Randall with a basilisk glare. Uncle Randall was holding himself upright and defiant, smiling, though his face was puffy with bruises.

Afterward they all processed from the chapel and up the long stairs, to arrange themselves in ranks before Grandpapa, that he might give them his blessing. He stared from his high white bed and had to be reminded who they all were. At last he moved his wasted hand on the counterpane, granting an abbreviated benediction on

posterity, and they were able to file from the sickroom into the clean-smelling twilight.

The wind had dropped a little but still moved the lanterns, that had candles inside them now and looked like golden moons glowing in the trees. It brought the sweet smell of wood smoke from an early bonfire. The dusk was lavender, so lambent everything looked slightly transparent, and the milling guests in the garden might have been ghosts. The child wandered among them, unseen as a ghost herself, watching.

There were stout old gentlemen with iron-gray wigs and wide-brimmed hats, who spoke at length with Uncle Henry about harvests and horse fairs. In high white wigs were young men and young ladies, lace-trimmed mincers of both sexes, who wondered why there were no musicians, and were quite put out to be told that there would be no dancing because of mourning for Papa.

Admiring gentlemen in silk stockings, slithery as eels, crowded around Mamma to pay her compliments, and Uncle Thomas held her arm possessively and smiled at them all. Aunt Caroline, on a couch that had been brought out for her, looked on dreamily. Uncle Randall edged through the crowd, telling first one inquirer and then another how his bruises had come at the hands of a low slut of a chambermaid, damn her eyes for a scheming hussy, wanted a guinea for favors as though she were the Queen of Sheba, screamed like a harpy when he'd paid her out in the coin she deserved! Ha-ha.

John and James lay in the arms of the nurserymaid and Aunt Elizabeth, who was glad to get off her feet, and the little boys stared in wide-awake astonishment at the glowing lanterns and ignored all their well-wishers, who moved on speedily to the collation table for cider and ham anyway. Some guests vanished in pairs into shadowy corners. There were perfumes of civet-musk strong in the air, there was wine flowing free. Someone got drunk remarkably quickly and tripped, and his wig went flying. It hit Uncle Henry in the face with a *poof* and a cloud of powder. People tittered with laughter.

The little girl walked through the shadows to the keeper's shed. She found the ring of keys where he had hung it up before hurrying off to the somewhat lesser collation for the servants. Nobody but the tyger saw her as she came and tried the big brass keys, one after another, in the padlock that secured the door of his pen. At last it clicked open.

She slipped it off. The bolt was a simple one, just like the bolt on the nursery door. Sliding it back, she opened the door of the pen.

The tyger paced swiftly forward, his green eyes gleaming. He looked much bigger out of his prison. He turned and gazed at her a moment; put out his warm rough tongue and slicked it along the pulse of her wrist, the palm of her hand. She felt a shock go through her body, an electric thrill of pleasure. She parted her lips but could find no words, only staring back at him in wonderment. He turned his head to regard the party in the sunken garden.

"Now," said the tyger, "We'll see, won't we?"

He stretched his magnificent length, gave a slight wriggle of his shoulders, and bounded across the courtyard. Standing beside the empty cage, she folded her little hands and watched.

He charged the party, vaulting from the top step into the sunken garden. Horrified guests looked up to see him land in the midst of them all, and gilt chairs were knocked over as people scrambled to get away from him, screaming in their panic. Some staggered on their high heels, some kicked off their shoes and ran in their slippery, stockinged feet. Aunt Elizabeth went over backward in her chair, clutching young James, and both began to shriek. The servants fled for their lives. Aunt Caroline watched all from her couch, too drugged to care.

HE STRETCHED HIS MAGNIFICENT LENGTH, GAVE A SLIGHT WRIGGLE OF HIS SHOULDERS, AND BOUNDED ACROSS THE COURTYARD. SHE FOLDED HER LITTLE HANDS AND WATCHED.

But the tyger leapt straight through the garden like a thunderbolt, overtaking Uncle Thomas, whom it felled with a sidelong rake of one paw. Uncle Thomas went down, howling and clutching himself, and blood ran red all down his white silk hose. The tyger didn't even pause, however, it sprang clean over him and continued forward, and the only person left before it now was Uncle Randall, who had broken a heel on the topmost of the opposite steps and was still there, frantically attempting to yank off his tight shoe.

Uncle Randall looked up into the tyger's eyes, but had no time to do more than bleat before it struck him. He broke like a doll, and rolled over with it into the darkness.

There was a second's hush, cries cut off abruptly in those who still crouched or lay sprawled in the sunken garden. Uncle Henry, who had crawled to Aunt Elizabeth's side, rose on his elbow to look and said, "O Lord God!"

The tyger appeared at the top of the steps, dragging Uncle Randall by the back of the neck. Uncle Randall's head hung at a strange angle and his body was limp. The tyger's eyes reflected back the light of the golden lanterns.

It stared at them all a moment before opening its jaws. Uncle Randall dropped like an empty coat. The tyger's beard was red.

It bared its fangs, and turned and bounded away into the night.

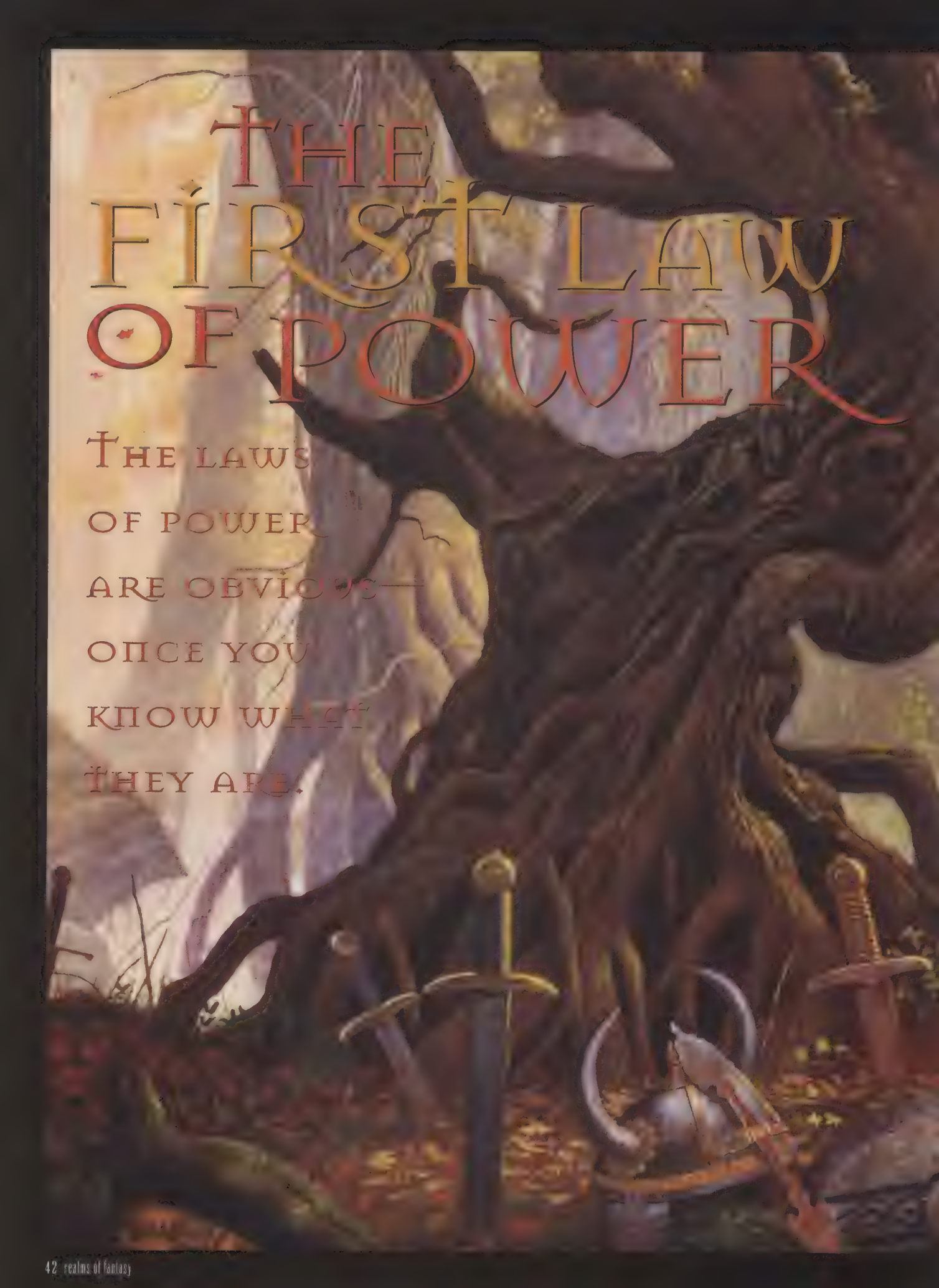
WHEN THEY ASKED HER WHY, SHE EXPLAINED. AFTER SHE HAD TOLD them everything, they made her explain it all over, and then explain once more. No matter how often she explained, however, they did not hear what she said.

FINALLY THEY SENT HER AWAY, TO A CONVENT SCHOOL IN FRANCE. IT WAS by no means as bad as it might have been.

She made no friends, but her eyes being now accustomed to look for detail, she saw keenly the fond possessive looks or angry glances between the other girls, heard the midnight weeping or sighs, saw the notes hastily exchanged; watched the contests for dominance ,and knew when the cloister gate was locked and when it was left unlocked, and who came and went thereby, and when they came too.

The heavy air buzzed like a hive. She no more thought of participating in the convent's inner life than she would have thrust her hand into a wasp's nest, but she watched in fascination.

Then, one morning at Mass, above the high altar, the crucified Christ opened green blazing eyes and looked at her. He smiled. ❧


THE FIRST LAW OF POWER
THE LAWS OF POWER ARE OBVIOUS— ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE.

BY RICHARD PARKS
ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN YOULL

Marta ordered the flames in her mother's hearth to dance. Black Kath sat at her table a few steps away, enjoying the warmth of the fire on her old bones but not really expecting anything else of it. The raven on her shoulder seemed content to doze and took no notice of either of them. Black Kath started to peel an apple.

"Daughter, why did you do that?" she asked.

Marta turned her face away from the fire. It was a lovely face; Black Kath had noted that fact with some concern a long time ago. A lovely face indeed, framed by hair only a shade yellower than the red of the fire itself. A face that was going to be trouble for Marta, sooner or later. No help for that, Black Kath knew. She tried to be what help to her daughter that she could.

"I wanted the flames to dance," Marta said simply. "So I told them to. I waited till Bone Tapper was asleep; I didn't feel like listening to his insolence."

"Bone Tapper is what he is, as are flames. Flames already dance. By their nature they can do little else. I rather admire them that; there are far worse ways to spend a brief life than dancing," her mother said ruefully. Black Kath's own time for dancing was long past. She winced. The pain was back in her chest; she knew what it meant. Marta would know soon enough. Black Kath was sad about that, but only a little. There was too much yet to be done. "Marta, lambkin, if you know they dance, why did you tell them to do it? Isn't that rather like telling a snowflake to be cold?"

"I wanted a pavane," Marta said. "Something with a little form and dignity. They just leap about."

"And that offends you?"

Marta reddened. "You're mocking me. You could make them do it."

Black Kath thought about it. "I suppose so … to both." She looked at the fire. She said nothing. She did not wave her hands or command. Yet in a moment the wild flames were suddenly chastened. They separated into two lines with but a spark separating a crown of fire on each side, as if the flames were holding hands. They processed side by side to unheard music. After several long moments Black Kath yawned as if losing interest and the flames settled back to their former chaos.

Marta stared at the fire long after the flames reverted to nature. There was a tear in the corner of one eye. "Mother, why won't you teach me? I want to learn!"

"Daughter, why won't you learn? I want to teach you."

"You're mocking me again!"

Black Kath finished peeling the apple and sliced it neatly in half. "No, I really would like to know. Have you been listening to anything I've said in the past 16 years? What are the Seven Laws of Power?"

"How can I tell you that? You've never told *me*!"

Black Kath sighed. "You are my darling daughter and I love you dearly, but you are a trial. First of all, I can no more teach you the Seven Laws of Power than I can teach your heart to beat. Either it does or it doesn't. Second, listen more carefully in the future—I didn't ask you for a sodding list! I asked you what they *were*."

Marta blushed again, but her mouth set in a firm line. "The Seven Laws of Power are the well from which a sorceress draws her art. A hedge witch might know one or two. A true sorceress would know all seven."

"Accurate enough, for one on the outside looking in. There's one thing I can teach you, Marta, so please learn: The Seven are not keys to power. They simply reflect the power and understanding you already have. When you grasp that, the true nature of the Seven will be revealed."

Marta looked away. "I have no power *or* understanding. That's the problem."

"You're too full of anger and self-pity to hear yourself think. That's the real problem." Black Kath handed her daughter half the apple. "Eat this. You're too thin. So was I, at your age."

"Thin, or too full of anger and self-pity?" Marta took the apple half and bit off a large chunk. She chewed sullenly.

Black Kath sighed. "Both."

"So tell me: What did your mother do about it?"

Black Kath laughed gently. "What I'm doing now. First, she made me eat something. Then she gave me this."

Her mother reached around her neck and pulled off the silver pendant she wore there on a leather thong and handed it to Marta. Marta studied the silver emblem; it was an arrow bisecting a circle. The nock and the point of the arrowhead just touched the edge of the circle.

"It's a nice piece of jewelry," Marta said. "But I don't understand; what has it to do with the Laws of Power?"

"You do keep to the point, Marta, as best you understand it. That's good. You don't *understand* the point very well, however, and that's not so good. You think this is just a piece of jewelry?"

Marta frowned. "Isn't it?"

"It's the symbol of the Arrow Path. The Arrow Path is the way I found the Seven Laws of Power. It's the way you'll do the same … or not, as the fates and your own will decree."

"Is it magic?"

"No. It's a symbol, and that's much more powerful. As such it represents a decision to seek out the Seven Laws. Thought given action is the beginning of all things."

Marta couldn't quite hide her disappointment. "That's all? I made that decision long ago."

Black Kath sighed. "No, my lamb. You've dreamed and you've imagined, but now is the time to decide. You're old enough to distinguish between what you merely want and what you need, so

There was so much there, said and unsaid, that made Marta's fear grow like a strangling vine. It was only a matter of time, she realized.

if you do need the Seven Laws of Power then you will join those on the Arrow Path. The arrowhead touching the circle represents the beginning of a journey that has no end. Do not undertake this lightly."

"I don't understand what that means, Mother. If this way leads to the Seven Laws, won't that be the end of the journey?"

Black Kath shook her head. "The Seven Laws are not the end, Marta. You won't see that now; I didn't. Nor does it matter. All you have to do is decide."

Marta hesitated, but only for a moment. She hung the pendant around her neck. It felt surprisingly heavy, for all that the action felt right to her, like an ache that finally goes away. "I've decided. What now?"

The door of the kitchen creaked open. Black Kath's servant hob, Treedle, stuck his ugly face into the room. "Mistress, you have a visitor."

"There's your answer, Marta. Life goes on. The world turns. Events unfold. Just like before. If there's a difference, you'll have to make it yourself." She turned to the hob. "That will be a messenger from Prince Alian, yes? Ask him to wait for a moment and I'll see him. Fetch him a goblet if he's so inclined."

Treedle nodded and closed the door softly. Marta didn't bother to ask how her mother knew who was at the door; that was one of the least of what she had seen over the years.

Black Kath poked the sleeping raven. "Get off, you lazy thing!"

The raven croaked once, blinked, and then hopped down to the table. It eyed the apple peelings Black Kath had left there, and then ignored them. "You interrupted a very lovely dream," it said.

"I'll do more than that if you leave a mess on that table. I have a guest to see now, but I think you should prepare yourself for a journey."

"Delighted," said the raven, clearly not delighted at all.

In a very short time Black Kath was back, accompanied by a young man with long blond hair and a self-important air. "Prince Alian's wife is in a difficult labor. I am sent for," she said.

"You're not a midwife, Mother," Marta said.

"No, it was the midwife who sent for me. I rather trust her judgment in this." She turned to the messenger. "You needn't stay. Tell Mistress Thornap I'll follow as soon as I can."

The man nodded once and left without speaking at all. Marta watched him go. "I don't like him," she said.

Black Kath raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Why is that?"

"I didn't like the way he looked at me. I didn't like the way he studied this room as if there might be something here that concerned him."

"No matter. He's on his way back to Karsan and, with luck, you'll never see him again." Black Kath turned to Bone Tapper. "Tell the horse to get ready. You and Treedle will be going with me. I'll have need of your eyes and his strength."

"What about me?" Marta asked. "Do I start seeking the Laws of Power now?"

"You already are, though you don't seem to realize it. I was thinking more of our orchard, if you want hot cider this winter. Like the Prince's firstborn, the rest of our apples won't deliver themselves."

A cool morning breeze chilled the sweat on Marta's brow as she reached up into the branches. She shivered. *Funny how, with great mysteries to be solved, the apples still have to be picked.*

She reached for another apple, perfectly ripe by the look of it, and hesitated. A thought came unbidden, as they almost always do, but this one told Marta something she hadn't known before. *It's about to fall.*

Marta blinked, and in that space of time the apple did, indeed, fall. She had enough presence of mind to open her hand and grab it before it could hit the ground and bruise itself. She held it in her hands for several long moments, wondering. "How did I know that?" she said aloud.

She hadn't guessed the apple was about to fall; anyone who knew a ripe apple from a green one could have said as much. No, this was different. She *knew.* But how?

Marta froze in place, listening. There was a jingling sound on the breeze, something out of place in the normal background of creaking branches and rustling leaves that marked the apple orchard. Marta kept very still, wondering for a moment and then rejecting the notion that she'd made the sound herself. She wasn't wearing any jewelry except for the pendant her mother gave her the day before, and that was safely tucked under her jerkin. After a moment she heard the sound again, closer, but with a definite direction attached to it.

I can't let him see me.

Another certainty, and just as unbidden. In one corner of her mind Marta realized that what was happening to her now was important in ways she couldn't even begin to understand, but mostly she was thinking about the best place to hide. From whom? She didn't know, but that didn't seem important just then.

Marta very carefully set her bag of apples near the base of the tree where they would be less conspicuous, then jumped up to catch the lowest branch and pull herself up. The tree wasn't especially large, but the leaves were thick and would make good cover, especially if whoever was nearby didn't think to look up. Marta moved quickly and carefully as high up as she thought prudent, and then kept very still.

The jingling sound, closer now, was easily identifiable as a horse's bridle. She could hear the clopping sound of the beast's hoofs just at the edge of the orchard, but she still couldn't see who it was. Marta tried to peer around a clump of leaves and reached for a branch to steady herself. Three things happened in quick and precise order: The first was that instant flash of knowing, or rather of *recognition,* that the branch Marta had reached for was not sound. The second thing that happened was that the branch broke. The third thing was Marta fell out of the tree.

Yet even as she fell, Marta was thinking primarily of the first happening. It was important. She didn't know why, but she didn't question her certainty in the least. Then Marta hit the ground, and for a while didn't think about or question much of anything.

"I suppose you meant to do that?"

Marta's vision slowly passed from darkness to glaring light. She lay on her back on the ground under the apple tree, staring up into the face of the handsome young messenger from the day before. At least, Marta thought he was handsome. She didn't have much to compare him to, so she wasn't entirely sure. She did know that she had detested him at first sight and her present situation hadn't done much to endear him.

"Of course I didn't mean to, you fool!"

He grinned. It was an extremely unpleasant expression, to Marta's way of thinking. "I'm a fool? I'm not the one falling out of trees like a drunken squirrel."

Marta started to get up, felt dizzy, sat back down. The "drunken squirrel" remark cut a little closer to home than she would have

liked to admit. She managed to glare at him. "What are you doing here? You delivered your message and my mother obeyed."

"She forgot something. She asked me to return and fetch it."

Marta wasn't impressed. It wasn't even a very convincing lie, as lies went. Perhaps if she hadn't still been a little woozy from her fall she might have made more of an effort to pretend otherwise, but just then it was too much trouble. "No she didn't."

She tried to sit up again; this time she made it, with the man's hand on her shoulder to steady her. She tried to brush it away but he merely tightened his grip, making Marta wince. "You're hurting me!"

"That was your choice, since your honesty has left me no other. Get up." He didn't wait for an answer; he just grabbed her by the arm and pulled her upright. Marta was so dizzy she almost fell down again, but she was determined not to let that happen. She didn't fight his grip; she used it to steady herself until the world stopped spinning quite so much.

"Where are they?" he asked.

Marta blinked. "What are you talking about? What do you want?"

He sighed, affecting a slight air of affront. "What indeed? If your mother was a jeweler, I would be asking about jewels and gold, would I not? For a brewer, ale and beer. Your mother is a witch. I suppose you are too. So what am I asking for? Think carefully and the mystery will be revealed."

"I have, and it isn't. You've been rude and I no more care for that than my mother will when she finds out. Speak plainly."

He stepped back a bit as if to get a better look at her, though he was careful not to loosen his grip. "Oh, I'm sorry, I clearly didn't understand. You're simple, aren't you?"

Marta just stared at him, stunned into silence. He apparently took that silence for assent. "Well then, I will speak plainly. First, what your mother discovers or doesn't is of no concern to me … or rather, soon won't be. Second, since it's not obvious what I want, I shall tell you: I want your mother's books."

Marta frowned. "Books? You mean the ones she uses for accounts?"

"Accounts…!" the man looked to heaven. "I mean her books of magic, you dolt!"

Marta blinked. "There aren't any."

Now it was the would-be thief who was speechless, but only for a moment. "Girl, don't lie to me!"

"But … it's the truth. Why would I lie about it?"

"You'd lie to keep me from finding the books, of course. Good thing I'm not so simple as you are, so I don't believe you."

Marta found her anger again. "I'm not simple, and what you believe is between you and the Powers. I've told you …"

The man sighed and pulled a dagger from his belt. This he held to Marta's throat. "Do not trifle with me. I'm taking a considerable risk here, I know what I want, and you're going to give it to me. Now, then: Do we understand one another?"

Marta took a deep breath, let it out. "I understand perfectly. Yet I can't give you what doesn't exist."

He looked grim. "Shall we see now just what does exist? Take me to your mother's rooms."

The thought of being alone inside the house with this lunatic wasn't especially appealing to Marta, but she couldn't think it would be much worse than being in the orchard with him now. Besides, the point of his dagger, now pressed to the small of her back, was very persuasive.

Marta knew her life was in danger, but that wasn't the worst. She also knew beyond question that the young man was even more afraid than she was. This did not make her feel any better. Quite the opposite. Black Kath had taught her long ago that people who are afraid will do stupid, crazy things. Marta barely needed the lesson; she had seen as much herself.

If he's so afraid, why is he doing this?

She hoped she could get at the answer before his fear caused him to do something horrid. She knew it was only a matter of time before that happened.

"I'll take you there," she said and the man nodded, for the moment, content.

His name was Laras. He got around to telling her that somewhere during the search. "Not that it matters, you understand, but you probably should know. You have the right, I think."

There was so much there, said and unsaid, that made Marta's fear grow like a strangling vine. It was only a matter of time, she realized, before she did something crazy and stupid herself.

If that happens, I'm lost, she thought to herself, knowing it for simple truth. Marta tried to think. She couldn't give Laras what he wanted because it didn't exist. Could he be made to understand? A man with so much invested in an idea would be loath to give it up, yet she had to try. "Why do you think the source of my mother's power is a book?"

He just looked at her, in that condescending way he had when he clearly thought she was being simple. "The priests of Amatok recite their liturgies from a book. The Prince's household accounts are in books. All the wisdom of the ages is contained in books, or so the clerks say. Your mother knows spells, incantations, charms … she can turn people into animals! You can't tell me that such things don't take great care and preparation and formulas impossible to remember." Laras stopped riffling in her mother's linen chest and pulled Marta closer. "There has to be a book. Where is it?"

Marta finally understood. *Maybe I'm as simple as he thinks.* "You want my mother's power."

"Of course."

Marta blinked. "Why?"

He just stared at her for several long moments. "I'm a messenger, girl. A servant, and if things are left to their normal course that's all I'll ever be. Yet I see the ability to shape the world all around me. I've seen what it can do. Political power. Magic. The Prince gains his power from his birth, your mother from her knowledge. I can't change my birth, but I can learn. I *will* learn, and I need that book. I knew your mother would be away and I made my choice."

"You need to make a different choice. You need to learn. What you want to know isn't in a book."

"Girl …"

"Marta."

"Marta, I'm not a fool, so don't play me for one. If magic was a simple matter you'd have turned me into some small crawling thing and stepped on me out in the orchard."

"That's not the way it works," Marta said.

Laras fingered his dagger. "Very well, then. *Tell* me how it works, and then I won't believe you and we can proceed without wasting any more time on your nonsense."

"What you're really seeking are the Seven Laws of Power. They are the beginning of mastery; once you have those there's no need for a book, except an accounts ledger. That's what my mother has, as I told you."

"An accounts ledger? Pray, how does one work magic with a tally book?"

Marta glared at him. "You don't, of course. What you do is keep track of what you are owed. Magic costs. When you work magic on behalf of someone else, that person owes a debt. Debts are very powerful; for all I know that's one of the Seven Laws. I—I don't understand it fully myself, but I've seen how it works. If someone comes to my mother for help, she gives it. But the service must be paid for, even if the person is a dear friend. If the person has no gold or the service is too great, my mother takes payment in kind."

Laras shook his head. "It all sounds very practical; there's something appealing in that. Yet what has that got to do with turning men into animals?"

"Everything," Marta said. "My mother accepts service where it's needed most. Bone Tapper is a raven because mother's eyes are weak and she needs someone to see for her. What better than eyes with wings? Then there's her cart horse—"

"Enough! Are you saying that it is only the debt that gives her the power to transform?"

"She has to have permission, in a way, from the person transformed. The debt gives that assent. I'd tell you how that links to the Seven Laws but I am not my mother and there's much I do not yet understand. You may believe me or not, but I'm telling you the truth."

Laras just looked at her for several long moments. He finally sighed, deeply. "I believe you."

Now it was Marta's turn to stare. "You do?"

Laras looked at her pityingly. "Of course I do! Even the Prince's finest bards couldn't have made up such a ridiculously unlikely tale on the spur of the moment. You're certainly not that clever. Damn."

"I'm sorry, Laras." To her own surprise, Marta realized she did mean it. She understood what it was to be disappointed.

"As am I." Laras didn't release his grip on her arm. If anything it was tighter than before.

Marta read his intention. There was a hollow, sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. "You intend to kill me, don't you?"

"Yes."

Marta struggled to keep her voice calm, if nothing else. "May I ask why? I'd have given you what you wanted if it was mine to give. If it existed. Would you have killed me then?"

Laras looked insulted. "I'm not a monster, Marta, whatever you think of me. If I had the book I could have fled far away. Perhaps taken a job in a stable or something, at least long enough to learn what I needed to know to guard against your mother's revenge. What choice do I have now? A Prince's messenger is not so grand a thing, but it's far more than I had. If I lose it I lose everything, yet if I stay now … well, we both know what would happen."

"Suppose I don't tell her about you?"

"Suppose I believed you there, too? I'm not such a fool as that, Marta. I knew what a risk I took coming here. I'm not going to take another for no gain. If it helps, tally that in your book."

Marta's mind raced. "Wait … there is no book. That doesn't mean there is no power."

The stone. Marta touched the stone, and she knew something about it, something she couldn't see before then.

"Don't waste what little breath you have left, Marta. We both know you'd say anything to save your life."

"Of course I would. Even the truth. The Seven Laws of Power."

Laras hesitated. Then, reluctantly, he spoke again. "I'm listening."

"The Seven Laws of Power will give you what you want, and their nature is that, once you learn the first, the others will come. That's called 'The Arrow Path' and it's the way all witches and sorcerers gain their power at first. I just started the Arrow Path yesterday, but I know where to go to find the First Law. If you have that you can start over anywhere, and it won't matter if I tell tales on you."

"So why haven't you done so already?"

Marta looked grim. "Because my mother told me to harvest the apples first. You don't argue with Black Kath of Lathos. Especially if you're her daughter."

Laras frowned. "Not to rain on the flame or anything, but how do you know I won't kill you anyway? That way I'd have the First Law and the leisure of my position to find the rest."

"You said you weren't a monster, and only you know if you're telling the truth. I have to gamble that you are."

Laras smiled then. "Lead on."

Laras wasn't taking any unneeded chances. He'd taken a length of stout rope from his saddle and tied it securely around Marta's waist, knotted at the back so it would be difficult for her to reach. Marta felt like a dog on a leash.

Laras put one more loop on the final knot. "How far is this cave you're talking about?"

"About a mile. Well concealed, though. You'll never find it without me."

"Assuming I'm willing to tramp these woods for days looking? Not likely. Let's go."

Marta knew that Laras didn't entirely believe her, yet his need forced him to take the chance. And it wasn't entirely a lie. Black Kath *had* discovered the First Law of Power in that very cave, or so she had said. Yet Marta had been to the cave herself many times looking for the First Law, ever since she was old enough to know that the Seven Laws existed. If the First Law was to be found

there, so far Marta had entirely failed to do so. This would be her last chance.

What reason do I have to think this time will be different?

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS DECIDE.

Black Kath's voice. A memory from the day before. Marta felt the pendant representing the Arrow Path next to her skin. She'd almost forgotten about it.

I have decided, Mother. I hope that's enough.

Marta made and discarded a dozen wild schemes as they walked, Laras over a score paces behind her, she leading the way at the end of his taut leash. Laras was half a head taller than she was and twice as heavy; she couldn't overpower him and, with the rope tied around her, she couldn't run. Marta reached behind her, touched the knot. Laras pulled once on the rope, jerking Marta painfully.

"Don't," he said.

Marta didn't know why she'd done it in the first place. She knew she couldn't untie it with him watching her. For that matter, Marta wasn't sure she could untie it at all. And yet why, for just a moment, had she seen an image of the ropes parting easily, almost as if cut?

For that matter, how did I know that apple was going to fall, and that branch to break?

Perhaps she was imagining about the rope, but she was sure that wasn't the case for either of the other two. She was as sure of both as she was of her own name. It was important, and no mistake. But what did it mean? She looked for the pattern as she walked, all the while not even certain if there *was* one to be found, or if it would matter if there was. They would be at the cave soon, and when Laras didn't find what he was looking for, he would kill her and that would be that. Laras's fear would make him into a monster after all.

"Apples ripen and fall. It's their nature," she said aloud.

Laras frowned. "What?"

Marta ignored him. There was no time. She was on the trail of something, perhaps something important. "So do apple branches, eventually. All living things grow old, lose their strength, grow weak …"

"True enough," Laras said. "Your point is?"

Marta didn't know. She found what seemed an insurmountable obstacle, like a rockfall blocking her path. Something that didn't seem to fit. "Ropes aren't living things."

Laras sighed deeply. "Marta, I'll thank you not to go mad with fear *before* we reach the cave."

Marta wasn't mad or even, at the moment, afraid. Her thoughts proceeded with the clarity of well-polished crystal. Ropes were not alive and yet they still aged, grew weak, developed imperfections. Eventually a rope would fail, even though that was not what it was designed to do.

"Strength always yields to time …"

Laras just rolled his eyes, but Marta wasn't looking at him. It was as if he didn't exist, or at least no longer mattered. She could think only of what she had just said, knowing it was true enough but also knowing that it wasn't the answer. Close. Very close, like a name known in childhood or the words to a song she could almost but not quite recall.

Time was the problem. Or rather, it wasn't the *answer*. Something else was, a word she had spoken but now couldn't name. "It isn't Time," she said finally.

"I disagree," Laras said. "This would appear to be your cave."

Marta had been so deep in her own thoughts that she'd quite forgotten about the cave, though apparently she had led Laras straight to it. It was nestled in the bottom of a high, wooded hill, looking no more than a darker patch of shadow until one was quite close. The opening was no more than five feet across, though it widened considerably farther in. No stream flowed from it; this was merely a break in the rocks where part of the roof had reached close enough to the surface for a small cave-in to create an opening.

Laras surveyed that opening with satisfaction. "Well, at least I know you were telling the truth to this point. Now you will show me where the First Law of Power can be found and you'd better not be lying about that."

"Of—of course," Marta said, and tried to sound like she meant it.

Yet she didn't. Marta *was* lying. She didn't know where the First Law of Power was, or *what* it was. Just because her mother had found the First Law here didn't mean that Marta would; she knew enough to know that it just didn't work that way. She was close to it; she felt it. She could almost *taste* it, but still she could not name it.

"Strength gives way to weakness," she whispered to the stone. "It's a paradox, but it's true."

Damn, I'm out of time.

Marta already knew that time wasn't the answer. Time destroyed power? Yes … and no. Apples fell. Branches broke. Ropes rotted. Power ended. Was it just Time? Did Time alter the sun, wear down the seasons? No, it was not Time … necessarily. What was it? Marta walked very slowly toward the entrance, with Laras following at rope's length. She put up her hand to brace against the stone so she could peer into the gloom. Neither of them had thought to bring a torch.

What is this?

The stone. Marta touched the stone, and she knew something about it, something she couldn't see before then. Just like the apple, and the branch of the apple tree.

"What are you waiting for?" Laras demanded. "Go on!"

"If I go first, I might find the First Law before you do. In fact, I will."

Laras looked at her intently. "Are you saying I should kill you now? You *are* mad."

"Not at all. If you kill me, likely you won't find it at all. It's hidden in a place not so easy to see."

That part, at least, was no less than truth.

Laras hesitated. "We seem to be at an impasse."

"May I make a suggestion?"

Laras didn't bother to hide his suspicion. "You're being much too cooperative."

"Am I? If, as you say, you're no monster, then you'll let me go once you find the First Law, the one that will, in time, unlock all the others. I want you to find that bloody Law as much as you do."

"Well …"

Perhaps he was going to confess what Marta already knew, that she was dead either way. There was a certain annoying honesty in his character that might push him to it, but Marta didn't give him the chance. Better the pretense than the truth, when the pretense kept her alive. "Hobble me," she said. "You have enough rope. Even if I could untie the knot around my waist I couldn't get loose from the hobble too. Not before you catch me. That way you can enter first without worrying about me getting away, and I can direct you."

Marta gambled that Laras's need was stronger than his suspicion, and this time she was right. Laras shortened his leash by a few feet and then cut off the extra. Marta eyed the change.

Close … but it might be enough.

"Stand still."

Marta obeyed, and tied the ends of his hobble to one ankle and then the other. "Now, then. Show me which way to go."

"Inside, of course. The passage will go left and right. Go toward the right."

"Very well, follow me."

"I don't have a lot of choice, Laras."

He laughed then. It was a hollow sound. There was neither mirth nor cruelty in it. Marta fancied she saw a little of what drove Laras then, and what could have been different for him. For both of them.

Your need drives you to become something you are not. With a better choice that could have served you well.

Marta approached the entrance to the cave again, pulled by Laras's rope as he worked his way deeper underground. Marta reached out, slowly, praying her hand would find the place she knew must be there, that she would feel, would *know*, what she needed to know.

There.

Something amiss in the rocks. A potential that would take but the slightest push to manifest to great effect.

"The rock looks very strong here, held in place by forces greater than a hundred men. But it isn't strong," she said, too softly for Laras to hear this time. "It's weak."

The feeling was sudden and powerful, more so even than before. It was the word. Not Time. Weak. Weakness. The rock would not hold. Would not? *Could* not, for anyone who knew the secret. Marta took a deep breath and struck one stone above the entrance, just the one. In a moment, the hill rumbled. Marta threw herself backward against the rope as several massive blocks of limestone fell from the roof of the cave at the entrance. The first one just missed her as she struggled against the rope. The next cut the rope cleanly in two as it smashed against the first and Marta went sprawling and fell, hard. The roar and rumbling continued for several long moments as she struggled to regain the breath that had been knocked out of her. When she rose again all was silence. She leaned close to the mass of rubble blocking the entrance to the cave.

"Laras?"

"Damn you!"

The reply was muffled but unmistakable. Laras yet lived. Marta felt some relief at that, but for the moment she couldn't say why. He had been planning to kill her; there was no question of that. By all rights she should wish him dead, but she did not.

She shouted to be heard through the blockage. "Are you all right?"

"Oh, well enough," he said. Then, "Of course I'm not all right! I'm trapped!"

Marta smiled then. He was unhurt. Since he wasn't dead, then undamaged was better. It would make things simpler. "Shall I get you out? I can do it," Marta said, and knew she spoke the truth.

"Now, how could I persuade you to do that?"

"I would do it freely, Laras. But then, you see, you would be in my debt. Remember what I told you about debts?"

Laras made a sound. It might have been a curse, it might have been an expression of pure terror. Marta was certain it was one or the other.

"Yes, you do understand. How would you like to be a snake? They can crawl out of tight places easily enough. I think you would make a fine snake."

"You're bluffing!"

"Are you sure?" Marta asked, sweetly.

Silence.

Marta nodded, even though he couldn't see her. "You see we have a problem," she said. "Or rather, you have one."

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm going to take your horse and go find my mother. She will be very interested in all this, I believe."

"The First Law of Power was never here, was it? You lied to me."

"No, Laras. The First Law is indeed in that cave. If you look for it, you might even find it. Perhaps in time to escape before we get back. I'd advise that, I really would."

"It's not that I have a choice," Laras muttered; Marta barely heard him.

Yet hear she did, and knew he was wrong. He had a choice, and made the wrong one. There was still time to make the right one. For, when he finished stumbling around in there, he would inevitably find the *other* entrance, on the far side of the hill. If he was wise, he would use it to be long gone before Black Kath heard of this day's work. Marta's choice was that she would not go around to the other side and seal that entrance as well, trapping Laras there in truth rather than assumption.

Why am I letting him go?

Marta didn't have to think about it too long. It was because she owed Laras a debt, and she had to repay it just as those who sought her mother's help had to repay her. Whether he had meant to or not, Laras had done her a service. With his unwitting help, Marta had found what she was looking for.

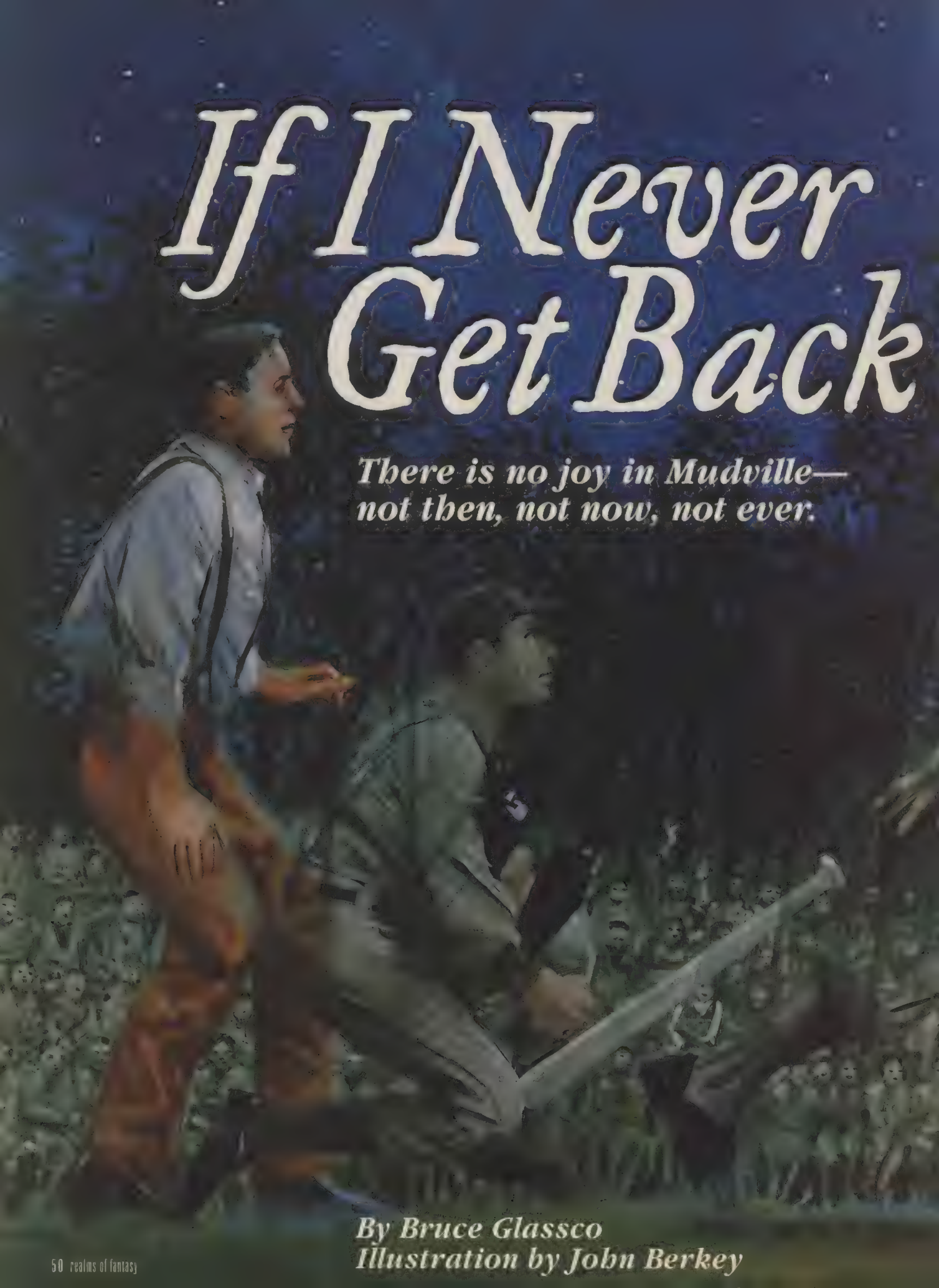
"Strength gives way to weakness," she whispered to the stone. "It's a paradox, but it's true." She played with the words, liking one sound better than another, feeling them out, going for the concept's best expression.

"What Power Holds, Weakness Frees."

Marta smiled. The First Law of Power. ❧

If I Never Get Back

There is no joy in Mudville—not then, not now, not ever.



By Bruce Glassco
Illustration by John Berkey

Looking out the window of a train at 4 AM, it's easy to get the feeling that you're the only person alive in the world. You see your fellow passengers' sleeping reflections in the black glass like paintings of dolls, and flashes of the backs of occasional homes, and the headlights of late-night cars. Once in a while, another train appears suddenly in thunder on the tracks beside you, and disappears like the end of the world. Still, none of it quite reaches you as you lean your head against the cold glass that feels nothing like a pillow, trying to remember what sleep feels like. Not a single person who knows your name could say exactly where you are right at that moment. Perhaps no one cares. Your point of origin and your destination are nothing but dreams, and you know that the rails will stretch on before you forever.

The year was 1994, and everything was in transit with me: job, relationship, home. I watched the moon race along beside me for as long as I could stand it, and then got up and headed for the dining car. It's not like there's a big variety of social hot spots on a train. If you're looking for entertainment at 4 AM, the dining car is pretty much it.

The car had its standard assortment of vagabonds. At one table a young couple was asleep opposite each other, their arms overlapping in the center—the guy wearing a frayed army jacket, his head shaved down to stubble, the girl with scarlet hair and bracelets tattooed around her wrist. A man wearing a rumpled business suit and beard shadow a long way past

5 o'clock had his head thrown back and was snoring gently, and a well-dressed black girl, probably a student, was reading a geology textbook nearby. The guy perched on a plastic stool behind the concession counter was reading too, the red-bordered sports section of his *USA Today* shaking with the train's rhythm. He put it down and stood up when I approached the counter, his body swaying in perfect balance to the percussive rhythm of wheels on rails.

I ordered a hot dog and milk, both of which sometimes help me feel a bit more restful, and watched him as he slipped the hot dog into a bun and poured the milk into its plastic glass. I was surprised that he seemed over 60—too old, you'd think, to want a job that involved being on his feet so much. He was about six inches shorter than me, his hair gray with a touch of yellow, the color of fog in headlights. His vein-webbed hands moved precisely in his narrow space as he handed me my food and counted out my change.

Since I couldn't sleep, I decided to talk. My eye fell on the paper, so I asked if he thought the strike was going to kill off baseball. I wasn't a huge baseball fan myself, but in '94 even baseball-haters were getting into the scene, either for the cheap, easy nostalgia or else the pleasure of kicking the national pastime when it was down.

"I've been hearing about the death of baseball for 50 years," said the guy, "and I've seen it survive wars and earthquakes and strikes and scandals and free agency and the designated-hitter rule. It'll take more than a strike to kill off baseball, buddy." He sounded the way priests do when you suggest that maybe Mary might have faked the whole Virgin Birth business. His teeth were cigarette-tar yellow.

I kept asking him questions, and he wasn't very difficult to draw out. His name was Jamie Miles, and he'd been a baseball fan since the day he was old enough to roll one across his crib. And he had been everywhere. I got the impression that he'd never had any roots for the past five decades, just drifted from city to city doing odd jobs and going to ballparks wherever he could. Of course I had no way of knowing whether or not he was telling the truth, but if he was, he must have had an uncanny instinct for attending the great ones.

The reason baseball can't die is because it's all about eternity.

He'd been there, he claimed, the last time Babe Ruth staggered out onto a field for his fans, leaning on a bat while cancer ran the bases around his throat, and 25 years later he saw Hank Aaron break the Babe's record. He cheered when Jackie Robinson ducked and weaved around six Philadelphia fielders before triumphantly jogging home. He saw Ted Williams take the last ball that would ever be pitched to him and knock it out of the park, and he saw the young Pete Rose run to first base in 4.1 seconds in an exhibition game on a *walk*, for Pete's sake. He saw Bob Gibson refuse to leave the mound even after a line drive had broken his leg.

"The reason baseball can't die is because it's all *about* eternity," he told me in a rush, his liver-spotted knuckles gripping the counter. "Ryan pitching no-hitters in three different decades. Ken Griffey father and son hitting home runs back-to-back. Hell, what about Ray Chapman, beaned with a spitball and going straight from home plate to his maker, eh? That one was before my time, but man, what a way to go!"

Well, they may have been lies but they were entertaining lies, so I made myself as comfortable as I could on one of the stools. My ex-girlfriend, I told him, would agree with him. She always said when I watched a game that it seemed to take an eternity just for the pitcher to make up his mind to throw.

"No wonder she's your ex, then," he said, chuckling. "Although I've known some women who'd get hot just hearing the crack of a ball and a bat." Then he paused, looking at me carefully with cloudy blue eyes. "This girlfriend, does she have anything to do with why you're on this here train?"

I looked down at the counter. "Partly," I said. "Partly."

He sighed, and seemed to be looking over my shoulder at something out the dark window behind me. "I knew it," he said. "A man always gets the same look when he's trapped between bases."

Well, I didn't feel much like talking about myself, so I asked him to tell me about the greatest ballgame he ever saw played. That set him back a bit. He thought for a while, and then perched back up on his stool and looked around the car at all the sleeping people. Then, hands in his lap, he told me this story. To really get the feeling of it, though, you'd have to hear it the way I did—in the claustrophobic fluorescent light with the darkness rushing by the window, and everything swaying gently as the rails vanished behind us like the past.

"The girl is what I remember most," was how he began, leaning back against the drink dispenser. "Imogene Difazio. An older woman—I think she was wearing too much makeup, but it was too dark and I was too young to tell for sure. And she had this terrible look in her eyes. I'd seen that look on people in the Philippines … like they'd just realized that they'd spent most of their lives going down the wrong road, and they were trying to turn around, and they weren't finding any signposts that pointed the way back to where they'd been before.

"I'd had a bit of a disagreement with a Jap—sorry, a Japanese machine gunner on Okinawa, so I got a chance to fly home early with my arm all wrapped up like a mummy. You can still see the scar," and he was rolling up his sleeve, but I shook my head and he rolled it back down. I had seen scars before.

"Well, I heard about V-E Day lying flat on my back in a hospital in New York. Good news and all, but it didn't amount to a hill of beans to my mates out in the Pacific. That whole summer of '45 kind of felt like waiting for the other shoe to drop for everybody … we was all ready to cut loose, but it was just a bit too soon, ya know?

"Anyway, I'd managed to make myself a buddy there in the hospital. Frank Dawkins, small-town kid, always telling me about his old tree fort and kick the can and suchlike. When he got released he gave me his address in upstate Massachusetts and said I oughta drop by sometime, and I don't know if he was serious or not, but as it happened I didn't have anyplace else that I was eager to go back to. I didn't know what his folks would say about the invitation, but I've always been a 'what the hell' kind of guy. So when the docs were fixing to let me go I had one of the nurses write him a letter saying I was on my way up, and a week later when they signed my papers, I hopped on a bus and up I went.

"Getting on the bus with the sling and all was tricky, but when I got off Frank was there at the station to pick me up, and his folks were awfully friendly and going on about how great it was that we'd done our duty and everything. A nice, all-American family. Irish Setter on the porch, casseroles in the oven …" I must have given some kind of sarcastic face about then, and he shook his head. "Hey, I know you kids these days don't believe America was ever like that, and God knows it wasn't *all* like that, but still … well, things were simpler, you know? Yeah, it's a cliché, but it's true.

"Those days just wearing a uniform and a cast, people would come up to you right out of the blue on the street and say, 'Thank you.' One old lady even slipped me a quarter in the bus station! Can you beat that? Sheesh. And at the town picnic the mayor asked Frank and

me to say a few words about Independence and I'd never been so tongue-tied in all my life. Frank said. ..."

Well, eventually I got him back to telling me about the girl and the ballgame. After he'd been there for a few days, his friend's parents took him down to the county fairgrounds for a Fourth of July picnic. Most of the town was there and he kept getting introduced to people, but mainly what he tried to do was eat. After the army and the hospital, he said, even potato salad and deviled eggs were manna from the gods.

"But I noticed something strange," he said. "And that was, nobody was playing baseball. No fireworks, sure, it was a war and all the gunpowder was being used. But how many Fourths have you ever been to where there isn't any baseball? I didn't ask nobody, but it just seemed strange.

"Look, you've got to understand: For me, that war *was* baseball. Or it was *about* baseball, anyway. We was supposed to be fightin' for Mom, baseball, and apple pie, right? Well, my Mom ran out on me when I was a kid, passed me off to aunts who passed me off to cousins till I couldn't tell you whose family I was supposed to be a part of. And apple pie was OK, but it wasn't worth getting your head shot off for. Baseball was the only thing I could think of that actually felt like America.

'The Japs even helped out. One night we was yelling out cracks about their emperor, ya know, getting frustrated about how much blood we was spending for every foot we went forward, and ya know what one of 'em yelled back? 'Fuck Babe Ruth!' Honest to God true story.

"Anyway, a little while later everybody went to a pavilion for a dance. The band started playing *Stardust*, and Lord, I was getting so sick of that song, on the radio morning and night. So I went for a little walk outside to get away from everybody, and that's where I met Imogene."

It was clear that she'd made a big impression on him, this long-ago girl, and equally clear that he still couldn't figure out why she had. Apparently he never did see her in daylight. "She was short," he said, "a small woman, small features, and older than me, somewhere in her 30s. She looked old-fashioned, somehow. Somewhere else I might not have looked twice, but I was feeling a long way from anywhere that night, and she just looked like the kind of person I needed to talk to. D'you know how that is?"

I looked around at the sleeping dining car and the backs of empty factories out the window, and I nodded. Yes, I knew how that was.

"Well, she asked me questions about myself that I didn't particularly feel like answering, and I asked the same questions back at her and got even less out of her than she got out of me. I got the impression that she was divorced, which of course was a lot bigger thing in a small town back then than it is these days. Never did find out anything about who she was divorced from.

"Finally, though, I got around to asking the question that had been bugging me all day: 'Doesn't anybody play baseball in this town?'

"She looked at me kind of funny when I asked that. 'There are some bad memories about baseball around here,' she said. 'We were kind of a laughingstock in these parts for a while. Sort of soured this town on the game. Me, I remember the way it was, though. You a baseball fan?'"

"So I told her how I felt about baseball. I told her that, yeah, I'd had a pretty mean arm on me, back in my high school days. I'd kinda been thinking of trying out for the Minors, although after my arm got shot up I knew that idea was blown straight to hell. Maybe I could be an umpire, I told her. I'd done that too. I did a bunch of things, back between when I dropped out of school and the war, but umpire was one of the ones I'd like the best.

"Now she'd never once asked me about the war, which was just as well because I didn't much feel like talking about it. But when I told her I'd been an umpire, she looked at me like I was some kind of conquering hero. That's the kind of look women throw at men when they want to get them to do something, but I was too young to know any better back then. And then she said that she had something to show me. My what-the-hell sense kicked in, so the two of us turned away from that pavilion and I let her lead me through the trees and into the darkness.

"We came out of the trees not far from third base of a baseball diamond overgrown with high grass and weeds. So I was trying to think what I was going to do about this divorcée taking me out into this lonely field in the middle of the night, what she had in mind for me and whether I was up for it, especially with the sling and all, plus I was still pretty young in a lot of ways back then. She climbed over a rusty little chain-link fence and then helped me across, which was tricky with the cast, of course. But eventually I made it to the other side."

The train was passing through a forest. Through the dining-car window I could see the shadows of the treetrunks, sliding past in the darkness like the rungs of a giant's ladder. The girl with the geology text had put her head down on her book and closed her eyes. The close-shaved guy turned his head, trying to get comfortable on the hard table, and his girlfriend stirred too and shifted and sank back into sleep. The guy in the suit had his head slumping sideways on the back of his seat. As far as I knew, the two of us and the engineers were the only ones awake on the whole train as it leapt through the night.

I was thinking about all the different kinds of empty. Take a big field in the middle of the night, crickets chirping and the moon overhead, and it would be no big deal. That was the way fields were supposed to be. Put bleachers on the sides of it, white lines in a diamond with no men to run them, big, dark outdoor lights, maybe a concession stand with shutters drawn tight, and it was a different picture. A lot more empty, somehow. The crickets would seem louder.

"There were men out there," Jamie was saying.

"Imogene was already walking up to the bleachers, so of course I had no choice but to follow her. The first thing I noticed was the silence. Even the crickets sounded like they were coming from a long ways away. I heard what sounded like an owl from the woods, and that was it. The men weren't making any more noise than a shadow.

"The second thing was that these men didn't have any color to them, like men in the movies back then. There was a pretty good moon—enough for you to at least tell what the colors were supposed to be in the trees and the grass, even if you couldn't tell them apart. But the men were all in shades of gray.

"The third thing I noticed was that, when the pitcher raised his arm, I could see right through it to the trees on the other side of the diamond.

"Actually, it was hard to see any of them if I looked straight at them. They faded. I had to look away a bit, off to the side. When I reached the bleachers I saw that that's what Imogene was doing. I sat down next to her, and we both looked off to the side, and I tried to watch the game. I had a thousand questions I wanted to ask, but I couldn't think of where to start, so I just watched. I watched Imogene, too. Her eyes kept going all over the place, and she was chewing on her knuckles like she was furious at something.

"Just as we sat down, a batter was hitting a grounder to the shortstop and getting thrown out at first. 'That's Cooney,' she said without looking at me. Her voice was a bit shocking in all that silence. I still couldn't think of anything to say, so I kept my yap shut.

"The next batter hit it right down the line to the first-baseman, another easy out. 'Barrows,' she said, and I thought of graves and burials and I shuddered, though the night was very warm.

"I knew my Americana, and I was starting to get a sneaking suspicion. I looked up at the scoreboard, and it read, 'Home 2, Visitors 4.' Of course it was the bottom of the 9th; it always is. I glanced at the home team's bench, and there, as advertised, he sat. The Slugger. He was holding a pair of bats in one big hand, casually resting them over his big shoulder, a shoulder so huge that the fungo sticks looked like pipe cleaners. No real sign of a neck from behind—it just looked like

his head kept getting wider as it went down. None of the illustrations I've seen before or since do him justice. Like Paul Bunyan or Pecos Bill, you could tell that he was destined for folklore or ignominy, or, the way the story ended up getting told, for both.

"I turned to look at Imogene, and she anticipated my question. 'Yeah,' she said, not looking at me or the field or at anything else other than maybe the moon. 'Yeah, I bet a lot of those old stories have more truth to them than most people suspect. And yeah, like you've probably guessed, this town used to have a different name.'

"I told her what the name had to have been, and she nodded.

"'That's right,' she said. 'But what the damned poem doesn't say is that a month after the game, the place lived up to its title. There was a big rainstorm on the Fourth of July, and on the way home from a game up in Lakeland the team bus just … slid … off the road into the river. So if the poem hadn't already made the town fathers want to change the name, that would have put the finish to it.'

"I went back to watching off to the side of the game with even more interest than before. An overweight fellow with a droopy mustache, probably in his late 30s or early 40s, was advancing to the plate. I wanted to look at him more closely, but of course, as soon as I looked at him full on, he more or less faded.

"Then she was up and running down the steps of the bleachers and out onto the field, so I had to follow her again. It was sort of like jumping off a boat and wading up a beach with people in bunkers shooting at you—not exactly the first place you'd choose for yourself to go, quite probably the last place in fact, and yet that's where you end up finding yourself with a surprised expression on your face, and you're getting a bullet or a phantom baseball aimed at you and there never seems to be a damn thing you can do about it.

"She was standing right by the plate, beside the crouching gray catcher. When I stepped onto the field I had to turn around and look back, because that's when I could finally hear the noise.

"The bleachers were still empty when I looked back, but somehow I could hear a faint distant roar swelling from them like the sea. I could see the cause of it, too. Behind me, the Slugger was standing, his big shoulders towering above the field, waving to all his invisible fans with the pride that we always love most when we know it's coming before a fall.

I noticed something else then, too. There was the Slugger, and six men on the bench. There was two men on base, and nine fielders. Eigheen men in all, which meant one man was missing. There was no umpire. And then I saw what it was that she wanted me to do.

"Ball One," I said, and I watched The first

'Flynn,' I said, and she turned and flashed a smile at me. It was a nice smile, but over awfully quickly. Then she went back to looking down the foul lines again.

Were there ghosts in the bleachers around us, too? I could imagine that there were, but I couldn't see them or feel them. When Flynn hit a floopy little pop-up fly to center field and the fielder muffed the catch, the silence was like five thousand ghosts leaning forward and holding their breaths. I asked her if there really had been five thousand people in the stadium, but she just said 'Hush' and watched the field.

"Jimmy Blake was little better than a teen-ager, an obvious hayseed rube who'd probably been recruited because his father donated the gloves or his family owned the practice field, or anything aside from actual coordination. He seemed just as surprised as the men on the field when the ball went mounting away over the left-fielder's head. He stared after it in slack-jawed surprise, and I was calling out, 'Run, you fool,' without realizing what I was doing. As if I could actually change something in a game that had happened … what, 20 years earlier? Thirty? Fifty? Imogene looked at me and smiled her best smile again, and I gave her a hangdog grin. 'Sorry,' I said. 'That was stupid of me.'

"And she said, 'You're wrong. Maybe this time you can make a difference. Do you have any idea how many Fourths they've been doing this? But maybe just this once, if the two of us try hard enough, maybe we can help them. I can't do it alone, and I've never found anybody else willing to help, anybody even willing to come out here with me and watch. But you, you've had people shooting at you and you aren't from around here and you love the game, so won't you please go down there and try to give it a different ending from the one in that awful poem? Please?' She was looking me dead in the eyes now with those sweet peepers of hers, even though I couldn't quite see the blue in the dark. I wondered if she'd ever been interested in me at all, or if all along she'd just wanted to use me and my old umpire's shirt, but somehow, if that was true, I didn't mind. Maybe it was because I was a soldier, and we'd had training on being used.

'Come on,' she was whispering to me as I came up to the plate, feeling the Slugger rolling slowly up behind me like a tank. 'Stand behind the plate and make a different call. You can do it. Try it! They won't listen to me, but maybe they'll listen to you. Please, please, won't you try it for me?'

"The Slugger was almost up to us by now, and I was thinking, what the hell, what the hell, and I was never sure if that was a justification or a question. But before I took my place I whispered back to Imogene, 'What's it to you? I mean, why do you care if that ox gets what he deserves once a year? Does he mean something special to you, or what?'

She looked at me kind of confused, and then she shook her head. 'No, it's not him,' she said. 'I couldn't care less what happens to him. It's the one out there on third base. His one chance at a little glory, even reflected, even after all these years, even though his run won't be the one that wins or even ties, even though no one else besides us will ever know. Eddie Flynn, stuck through all time a-hugging third. He's my father.'

And then the Slugger was right behind me, and I stepped out of his way and found myself falling into the umpire's spot, and then I felt like I was locked into it by a power that was a lot older than I was. I crouched and watched the Slugger going into his stance, and the pitcher was out there winding up and getting set for the big showdown."

The train gave a little jolt as if it was passing over a joint in the tracks, and I started. The sleeping couple shifted and slept again.

"Wait a second," I said. "Flynn, was he the one that the poem called a pudding, or was he the fake?"

"The pudding," said Jamie. "With the size of his spare tire you could see where that came from. In some versions he was a hoodoo, whatever that means. A lulu. Never a name that anybody would want to be called for all eternity, you'll have to agree."

"But …" I began, thinking already of some of the wild implausibilities that this story was built on, but he shushed me and I subsided.

"The slugger stood exactly the way he's described in the poem while the ball went by him the first time. 'Haughty grandeur'—that just about fits. I couldn't see the ball well, but I could see its shadow as it flew past him, and as it disappeared silently into the catcher's glove I felt the words overtaking me like a train out of a tunnel. I wasn't expecting it, the strength of those words, and they rushed out of me with my will or against it. 'Strike one,' I said.

I think I felt a wave of hatred directed against me when I said the words, just like the poem says. Umpires get that all the time, and I shrugged it off. But I looked over at Imogene, and her eyes were shining like stars.

'I didn't make it that far,' she said. 'It wouldn't let me in.'

"And then the ghost ball was coming noiselessly towards me again, the Slugger still standing in front of me like a big shadow, and I knew what I had to do. The ball hit the glove and I felt the words rising up inside me, and I fought them, I fought them as hard as I'd ever fought on Okinawa or anywhere else.

'Ball one,' I said triumphantly, and I watched the ghosts stop. They stopped where they were, all of them, and all 18 black-and-white transparent figures kind of shuddered like an old movie where the film was spliced. The first new thing they'd seen in decades, I was thinking. The Slugger actually half turned and stared at me, and I saw his big, meaty fingers rearrange their grip on his bat. But finally the catcher threw the ball out to the mound again, and the pitcher wound up again, and we got ready for the third pitch.

the ghosts stop. new thing they'd seen in decades.

"And somehow, that call did it. I think maybe it drained a bit of that air of confidence, of inevitability out of the scene. Maybe the pitcher didn't throw the next pitch quite as hard, maybe the big man concentrated just a bit more on the ball instead of on his adoring fans. He swung, he connected. The shadow of the ball headed toward the outfield.

"Imogene was running along the third baseline now, calling, pleading. The big guy with the goofy mustache was plodding forward, the Slugger was dropping his bat with a surprised expression and breaking into a jog toward first, the outfielders were running around like madmen, and the invisible crowd was screaming like souls in hell just given a glimpse of paradise. The only thing I could really see, though, was that big guy lumbering toward home plate, and his grown-up daughter running along beside him, crying, pleading.

'Come home, Papa,' she cried, and I could hear her tears from where I stood. 'Come home, Papa, oh please, please, Daddy, please come home.'

I could see his face as he approached the plate. There was wonder on it, and joy, like he'd been standing for decades on the banks of a river and the ferryboat had finally shown up after he'd quit hoping. Off in the distance I saw an outfielder scrambling for the ball but it would be too late, too late, and then as Flynn's foot touched the plate in front of me, all 18 of them started to fade out like a movie going to credits. I swear, though, I truly believe that, before he disappeared, Flynn turned around and looked at his daughter, and I think he waved at her before he left us alone on the field with the night and the crickets and the stars."

The guy in the suit suddenly woke up with a snort, pulled himself upright, and lurched unsteadily down the corridor toward the john. Jamie was leaning back against the drink dispenser again, and I couldn't read his expression. If he'd been pulling my leg I would have expected him to watch my face to see if I'd bought his story, but he seemed to have forgotten I was there.

"That bus," I said. "If it was the team bus that slid into a river, then how come there were 18 men on the field? Where did the visitors come from?"

"Yeah," he said, "I thought of that afterward. Have you ever wondered whether ghosts have ghosts?" He shook his head. "And something else. Any idea when that poem was written?"

I shrugged. "No idea."

"Eighteen eighty-eight, that's when. I looked it up later. Which means if she'd already been born by then, she would have been old enough …"

"Old enough to be your grandmother," I finished his sentence for him. He nodded, and I still couldn't make out his expression. "So what happened to her afterwards?"

He turned and poured himself a cup of coffee, then stirred in a cloud of cream. "She said thank you like she really meant it, and I thought maybe she was going to kiss me but she didn't. She showed me the way back to the pavilion and waved goodbye, and I never saw her again. I thought of asking Frank's parents about the whole thing, but decided not to. I wish now that I had."

He blew across the coffee and sipped it, then shook his head. "I thought about sticking around and trying to look her up, maybe going to the library to check out some of what she'd told me, but somehow … well, I was getting the feeling that my welcome with Frank's parents was wearing thin. Besides, thinking about that empty field gave me the creeps, you know? Anyway, the next day I hitched a ride out of town. Guess I've been on the move one way or the other ever since. You could say I've never managed to find my own way home."

The word hung in the air between us for a while as the tracks sang under our feet. Suddenly I wanted to be off that train in the worst way, but I knew that we still had hundreds of miles to go.

I couldn't think of anything else to say, so I asked him for another hot dog. As he pulled one from underneath the lamps he shrugged again, still caught up in the memory. "Just one of those crazy things, y'know? I guess it's like that sportscaster always says. 'You can tell that one goodbye.'"

From the restroom we heard the sound of flushing. At some point the student with the book had reawakened, and now she uncapped her highlighter and began marking a paragraph. The girl with the tattooed bracelets stirred. Her lover's hands had slipped away from her, and she reached for them, blindly, in her sleep.

As I made my way back down the rocking corridor, I heard Jamie whistling behind me. It was the old, old song, played by a hundred Wurlitzers in a hundred ballparks around the world, for longer than the oldest fan could remember. "Buy me some peanuts and Crackerjack, I don't care if I never get back."

"I'd never thought much about those words before, but on this night they made me shiver. I wasn't sure who or where I wanted to get back to, but I knew that I didn't want to think about the word "never" just then. I didn't want to be a part of all the not caring that gets piled up to make a never. Too many stars and empty fields in that word.

The train rushed forward through a world that slept, but would wake again all too soon. Before long, the perfect darkness in the window was spoiled by a touch of gray. ❧

In Sorrow Bring Forth Children

By Franklin Thatcher • Illustration by Lori Koefoed

Down deep, at the bottom of it all, really, all we have is hope.

The driving edge of the blade whined; carbide teeth blurred in the cutting space of matter diffused by time. The smell of sawdust clung to John Karl's clothes, his wrinkled hands, his fleece hair. In those moments of sound and scent and tearing wood he was safe. In those moments all was as it had been.

Dora had worried. Worried about what would happen to the house, the furniture, the annuities, all the things they had accumulated over the course of a life together. There were only nieces and nephews to claim the inheritance. No children had spun off into life like atomic offspring, gone to make their own way. Like lead from uranium, John Karl was the end of the line.

His fingers studied the wood, followed grain so fine that a blind man couldn't feel it. He switched on the coping saw, pressed wood to racing blade, cut fine curves and sweeping lines. He did not sketch beforehand, drew no lines on the wood. Dora had taught him to follow the lines that changed from moment to moment, cutting away what didn't look right. What remained was always a surprise.

When Dora had first taken up tole painting, she'd given him patterns from the craft shops: rabbits, elfs, and rag dolls, pumpkins and turkeys and Santas. The house had become a clutter of kitschy little toles, their clumsy forms crudely painted, staring out from behind the sofa, the darkness of the fireplace, atop the kitchen cabinets.

Then the cancer came. Through Dora's pain, the toles became an obsession, a task into which she could withdraw, until all that existed for hours on end was the tole and the paint-dipped brush.

When money became too scarce to buy patterns, John Karl made up his own designs. At first, he tried to imagine what Dora wanted, tried to cut patterns like he'd seen before but, as she set each freshly painted tole to dry, he realized that it made no difference. As her life ebbed, her skill with the brush grew, the sable bristles drinking her lifeblood like paint. It became almost a game: he cutting whatever random shape he could think of; she staring at it, sometimes for hours, before painting it into a spiteful little dragon, its neck twisted back, peeking between ragged wings; or a gremlin, knobby knees and elbows all akimbo, leering as if having just played some devilish trick.

At first the grim and violent images frightened John Karl. Not the images themselves, but the changes in Dora's mind that gave birth to them. Even when he tried cutting shapes suggestive of angels or unicorns, what emerged from her paintbrush was a bat-winged devil or a fire-breathing griffin. She painted from that desperate niche where she hung onto life, letting the toles bear her pain, her anger, her hopelessness. As her hair thinned and vanished under the assault of chemicals and radiation, the new toles replaced the old, which disappeared into the homes of nephews and nieces, new neighbors and old friends. Through the pain-driven, sleepless hours, Dora sanded and sketched and painted. Her hands, which shook with the ferocity of an alcoholic's, would suddenly still the moment brush touched wood, all the pain, fatigue, and anguish of her withering flesh seeming to flow out through the bristles and paint.

The pounds fell away. Dora's legs and arms, so long flush with the color of youth and of life, rendered finally to bone and hanging skin.

Their 50th anniversary came without card or gift from the unrelated family. He cut some roses from the back garden and put them in a vase, but she never mentioned them, never looked at them. She only painted.

When the cancer robbed her strength and she was no longer able to rise from her bed, he carefully bathed her each day, carried her to the toilet, fed her from their best china—baby food, because she could no longer keep down anything else. Each night, he rose every two hours to gently turn her body to keep her free of sores, and she seemed as light as the pieces of wood he brought to her.

One day she stopped speaking, only reached shaking hands for the next piece of wood. The house smelled of the acrylic paints, of urine, of the sweet smell of looming death; smells that John Karl only noticed when he re-entered the house after an absence to take out the trash or to buy groceries.

She now took days to paint each tole. Sometimes she would spend an hour on a single line, shorter than the bristles of the brush, but perfect when she finished.

In the makeshift shop in the basement, John Karl cut the wood, the sawdust flying as his hands, almost of themselves, moved the piece, cutting until he knew it was right. Did she care about his struggles to shape the wood, to conjure the elements of her panacea? No matter. He couldn't stop trying. It was the only part of her old self that he still shared.

He was her body now, cleaning her, maintaining her dying bone and sinew, and no more noticed by her than her heart, lungs, or liver. The only time she saw him, seemed aware of him, was when he handed her a freshly cut piece of wood. In the days between those moments when her eyes met his—when he saw the spark of remembrance that told him she was still in this husk—he cleaned, he swept, anything to keep his mind occupied, to forget what must inevitably come. He repaired the leaky faucet in the kitchen, puttied nail holes in walls where pictures hadn't hung in years.

He never left the house for more than a few minutes, long enough to buy a very few groceries, and only when she was in the throes of epiphany, the painted pattern of a new tole emerging from the wood.

As her arms weakened, he stayed by her bed, daylight or darkness, supporting her hand as her fingers moved the brush, following the direction of the failing tremor of her muscles. His own arms ached with the effort, but he couldn't *not* do it. He went days without shaving, stopping only long enough to bring food to her, only sometimes stopping to feed himself.

Then came the day that her brush stroke went awry.

The instant it happened, he knew the line was wrong—the very instant! The stroke was not a hair's breadth off before he knew. What could she be thinking? The piece was nearly finished. Had she changed her plan for it? But her quiet exhalation was followed only by silence, by stillness, by the gradual softening of her every tensed muscle, by the slacking of her jaw where no new breath was drawn over her lips. John Karl gently lifted her hand away from the tole, took the brush, rinsed it, and placed it back in the tray.

The family came, those few cousins still living, the nieces and nephews, now grown, with children and grandchildren of their own. They shouted when they spoke to him, assuming a man of his years must surely be deaf. But he heard their whispers as they saw the grim and evil-looking toles scattered throughout the house, tucked in every corner, sequestered behind every chair and table leg. They must've thought him blind, too, because they made no effort to hide their astonishment and revulsion at each hideous face and figure, monsters and demons of pain that they could never understand until they found themselves bound by the unforgiving ropes of cancer and hopelessness.

"Did he paint them?"

"No. Auntie did."

"Aunt Dora?"

"Impossible!"

"She couldn't have imagined such ugliness."

"He must be lying."

"It's some deep psychosis."

"Perhaps we should have him committed."

"Do you suppose the children are safe around him?"

But as the burnished coffin sank from light to darkness, the family drifted away, gratefully forgetting the little wood and paint horrors in mad Uncle John's house.

In the days after the cemetery, the silence of the house was different, the life imbued by the silent strokes of Dora's brush lost. She no longer waited for him to care for her, feed her, bathe her, clean her after a visit to the toilet, bring her another piece of wood to turn over and over in her hands, appraising, until she was ready to paint. On the mantlepiece, the polished brass of the bell-jar clock hung motionless within the glass, stilled as if history were somehow different, as if their life together were somehow other than he remembered. Dora's clothes hung as they had the day she took to her bed, each whispering of the last time she had worn it: a visit to the hairdresser, a walk in the park, shopping for groceries, attending Sunday service. Her shoes, sensible but with the slightest cut of elegance, lay arrayed as though she might slip her feet into them; as if, at any moment, he and Dora would be heading out the front door for dinner or a concert or just a walk on the tree-lined streets.

Beside the shoes, a gravel-skinned goblin stared at John Karl with eyes unnaturally large and round, gangly arms and legs all skewed like a spider's. John Karl closed his eyes, his knuckles

growing white as he gripped the frame of the closet door. If only he didn't have to remember.

He went downstairs, returned with a box, and carefully packed her clothing, her shoes, her costume jewelry. Into more boxes he put her makeup, her toiletries. Downstairs, he packed her yarns, the sewing machine, even the hundreds of remnants of multicolored and multi-patterned cloth which she had always promised to make into a quilt or a dress or an apron.

On the mantle, the clock hung motionless, like the instant of light and heat at Hiroshima, when history changed, when things could never again be the same.

He stacked the boxes in the garage, and called the Salvation Army to come and collect them. All through the house, as he carried box after box, the toles stared out of corners, from behind chairs and table legs. He stared back at the gnome that hunkered down where Dora's shoes had been. Who would want such a thing? He gathered the toles and stacked them on the hearth, until a veritable army of nightmares huddled fearfully around the sooty maw of the fireplace, awaiting the flame, a symbolic end to Dora's suffering. But, like the silence of the house, the toles, too, seemed to miss her. Maybe he would burn them tomorrow.

He searched the bedroom dresser for the old Polaroid camera. The film had expired the year before, but the image still gradually appeared, the trademark indistinctness of the instant film reducing the toles to a collection of colored shapes and vague textures, a misanthropic rabble blurred to benignity. Like the toles themselves, who would want such a picture? And all it would do for the rest of his life was remind him of the worst time of Dora's life, of her suffering when he could do nothing to save her. He dropped the picture into the kitchen trash.

He slept that night on top of the bedcovers, not even bothering to undress. In the gloom of the half-slept hours the sounds of the house rose about him: scratches, thumps, and scrapes; echoes of the day's labor of sheltering its bereaved occupant; whisperings he had learned not to hear in deference to Dora's ever-weakening call; sounds heard now only because her call never came. He awoke once to a cat scratching at the window, gangly legs silhouetted against the not-quite-black of the sky. Other times he awoke to weeping, and pulled the comforter close around him, covering his ears.

The truck came before breakfast, and John Karl stayed away from the garage, away from the windows that looked out onto the street. No need to watch them carry the boxes out, throw them in the back of the truck like so much meaningless junk. He stared at the motionless clock on the mantel, at the toles gathered around the waiting fireplace. Together, he and they waited for the rattle and clank of the sliding door, for the grinding of gears that signaled the final journey of all the things that had accompanied Dora's life.

After the diesel engine had murmured away to silence, he noticed two pink shapes beneath the dust ruffle of the sofa. Slippers. For an instant he was seized with regret for having rid the house of Dora's things, but they had only brought unbidden memories of her. John Karl was her history now—he and the toles. He took the slippers from beneath the sofa. As he stepped onto the back porch, his foot brushed against something that moved suddenly. His balance on the concrete steps became suddenly precarious, and he clung to the unsteady screen door. Sure of his feet again, he scanned the yard. "Damn cats."

In the trash can, the black plastic bags left by the funerary guests bulged with the odors of ammonia and dirty diapers. He set the pink slippers side by side on the top bag, then gently replaced the lid.

After dinner, he went through the house, looking under chairs and behind doors, wanting no more feline surprises, nor any other surprises like the slippers. He found nothing, only the clock that still needed to be wound; the paints and brushes on Dora's bedside table; the toles, still waiting like the lines at Auschwitz. He sat down in the easy chair in front of them, and they watched him with motionless eyes. "You must understand," he said. "It's not that I want to forget her. I couldn't if I tried. It's just that I have all of her …," he tapped his head, "here," then his chest, "and here."

The toles said nothing, did nothing. Dragons and ghouls and skeletons and …

The pebble-skinned gremlin wasn't there. He went up to Dora's room, and did not find it in the closet. He scratched his head, wanting to believe that he had set it down somewhere in the house and simply forgotten. As he looked, he stopped at the window in his bedroom. There were scratches in the painted wood of the sill—the inside sill. Downstairs, amid the smell of banana peels and stale milk in the kitchen trash, he found the Polaroid from the night before. There, huddled toward the back, sat the gremlin. John Karl stroked his stubbled face, unshaven since the day of the funeral. The toles stared back: the congregation of Dora's illness. In that moment, he knew each of their names: Agony, Denial, Hopelessness, Anguish, Grief, Bitterness, Fear, Defeat. All the names Dora had given up in the months of her illness; all the parts of her that had threatened to take over, to steal her reason to go on. Here was all that remained of Dora, of his 50 years' life with her; all that she was, distilled to these small and dire beings. He could not bring himself to destroy them any more than he could have prematurely ended her own suffering. Some part of Dora still existed, trapped in these skins of wood and paint, and she would never be entirely free until they were, too.

And so he worked.

Into the night, he cut piece after piece of pinewood, the blade whining, the sawdust heaping at his feet, the deep, rich smell of wood filling his nostrils, until at last he knew the piece was right. In Dora's room, he closed and locked the door, then sat on the empty bed, turning the wood over and over in his hands, remembering all that now lay buried beneath the muddied grass of the cemetery.

Their honeymoon on the cold Oregon coast had lacked the imagined perfection of sun and sand. On the rain-soaked beaches they had walked, hand in hand, finding sand dollars, finding an abandoned car that had been trapped and gradually swallowed by the beach until only one sand-scoured fender stuck up like the tip of an iceberg.

The passing of Dora's mother had desolated her, had left him confused at what to do until he learned that he had only to hold her, to take her into the womb of his protection while she grieved.

Athens, a second honeymoon many years after their marriage, and the glory of exploring another whole world together.

The lovemaking. From the Oregon beaches to the last year of her life. Knowing it would produce no children, it became a bond of giving between them.

Her music. Singing and playing the out-of-tune upright piano. John Karl had learned from her the joy of Bach and Chopin, Strayhorn and Ellington.

At last he stopped turning the wood, took up the brushes, and began

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always a storyteller

janny wurts:

If she hadn't become an artist and writer, Janny Wurts would have made a fine inspirational speaker, environmental activist, education advocate, bagpipe player, and/or horse trainer and rider.

Come to think of it, she is all of those things to boot, right after our conversation, she was heading off to the George Sheriff Memorial Invitational bagpipe competition in Hamilton, Ontario, where Janny, an Amateur Grade One Champion, would be representing the Southern U.S. Pipe Band Association.

She also just happens to be a best-selling writer and an artist who paints powerful compelling covers for her own books.

It's a unique position and one that comes naturally to her. "I don't believe in limitations on the creative process," she says. "Too many children are told 'don't' and 'can't' when they should be encouraged to express themselves. I'm interested in exploring creativity, not limiting it. And I bless my fortune every day, because I have wonderful editors and art directors who support my work in every way."

By Karen Haber

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: "Stormwarden," Taken to Task," and "Feathered Foe" show the diversity of Wurts' imagination and style.

"Visual art is powerful ... it

Janny believes that creativity extends to every aspect of life, and the lack thereof can have chilling consequences for both individuals and society as a whole.

"Visual art is powerful because it bypasses intellectual layers, goes back to something primal, that you can take in at a glance. It's a very powerful way of breaking through our screens and barriers."

As you might well suspect, Janny has spent her life avoiding being boxed in by educational and societal constraints. Her quiet rebellion began when, as a dreamy six-year-old, she had difficulty telling the difference between her own daydreams and mundane reality.

"I was an incorrigible daydreamer. I made no distinction between reality and what happens in your head. I literally didn't know I was daydreaming."

Since childhood, she's devoted her time to exploring and depicting those daydreams. "From a very early age I was always on this track

bypasses intellectual layers, goes back to something primal."

to bring what was in my imagination into external viewable form. I ask myself, what am I really perceiving? What's real for me?"

She got on the art track at Hampshire College. "I learned how to learn there." After that, there was no stopping her. She became an illustrator of gaming and Fantasy and SF art, but quickly discovered that she had many stories to tell that couldn't just be expressed in pigment on canvas.

Janny's stint at Hampshire opened her eyes to many different artistic approaches. "Does modern art have a place? I saw that yes, it did. Let those people express themselves. It takes a full round of spokes to make a wheel roll. For myself, I think I've always been a storyteller."

Growing up in Pennsylvania, she was heavily influenced by the artists of the Brandywine School, in particular Howard Pyle. She also cites Maxfield Parrish and Arthur Rackham as inspiration. "I was drawn to those artists who had the ability to show an image that reached into you and brought out more, who put something in an image that moved you."

Although Janny is steeped in the creative process, she admits that it differs depending on the medium she employs. "Writing and painting require different kinds of thinking, and one actually impedes the other. "When I'm writing, my mind works in very three-dimensional ways. I see it all with living color and sound."

"When I'm painting, I have to still my mind. It's helpful to bleed off the excess mental activity into music."

"I don't have models, I don't have photos. I paint from my gut. You have to fly on faith a bit. Just keep going at it until you get it. Let the painting itself dictate what it requires.

In her cover painting for *Grand Conspiracy,* Janny places her subject in an icy realm, precipitously balanced on a mountainside, trapped between his pursuers in the valley below and the darkness—literally—at the top of the stairs above him.

The best elements of Fantasy art are employed here. We see an

"When I'm painting, I have to still my mind."

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The defiant hero of Grand Conspiracy *is trapped on a mountainside by his enemies.*

OPPOSITE TOP: The U.S. cover for the Warhost of Vastmark.

ABOVE: "The Wizard of the Owls" shows a robed wizard in a wintery landscape. Note the beautiful detail on the horse and birds.

appealing hero, strange and unsettling details: Are those gargoyles perched on skulls leering at us? And are those vultures or eagles, circling high above in the frigid air? Far mountain reaches and their mysterious inner secrets.

Nothing is static in this composition. In the face of his peril, the subject is filled with determination. His body language, despite his torn shirt and wounded hand, spells defiance. And there is even a bit a hope to be found if the viewer looks carefully: The gryphons at the portal seem oddly benign, gazing at one another as though they share a special secret. The face above the keystone, at first glance forbidding and terrible, is perhaps just the old man of the mountain, not quite as malignant an entity as initially supposed. Even more telling is the flowering vine coiling out of the darkness and around the lintel, in defiance of the altitude and the cold and barren rock. Its tiny bit of life-enhancing color is echoed in the aura radiating from the tip of the hero's sword. Perhaps all is not yet lost for him.

The artist conveys a great deal of information—and emotion—without resorting to high key color. There's an almost monotonic color

scheme to the pale background. The hero anchors the painting with his somber-hued clothing. His flesh is the only spot of warmth in the composition besides the tiny flowers and sword's halo.

The heavy emotional lifting here is done by contrast, by light and dark. How appropriate, as this is the cover for the fifth book of Janny's The Wars of Light and Shadow series. Just a coincidence? I don't think so.

At home in Florida, Janny shares her studio with her husband, artist Don Maitz. What might be an uncomfortable experiment in togetherness works just fine for this creative couple, as Janny explains:

"What is it like living with another artist? Excellent. I don't have to explain myself. It's an advantage, another set of eyes. I'm not in the studio all day, while Don will happily work until 2 AM. It mystifies me how he achieves the effects that he gets on canvas, and vice versa. So we open doors for each other."

Janny says that a painting usually takes her four to six weeks to complete. She almost always paints in oils, cut with two drops of copal resin that she has made up by a chemist.

"It's not available commercially anymore. But I discovered that those two drops cut into paint affects the consistency of the oils. It holds the paint in a fluid state so I can work with it. I've even turned Don on to it."

Janny gladly takes on most creative challenges, looking for a positive approach and solution. "The toughest thing is to see more colors than the paint tubes have, to feel more emotions than you can capture. Painting is always a surprise, and a benefit. But until we have paints that go beyond the five senses, there'll always be something missing."

However, for this artist, any frustration is balanced by the pleasures of artistic creativity. "I'm satisfied when I've taken self-expression to the furthest possible place." ❧

Grand Conspiracy, *the fifth installment of Janny's* The Wars of Light and Shadow *series, was released in paperback in January 2001. And her next book,* Peril's Gate, *is scheduled for publication early in 2002. To check out more of Janny's artwork, see her Web site at* www.paravia.com/JannyWurts.

THE PANTHER and the Lamb

Sometimes "I'll love you forever" means exactly that.

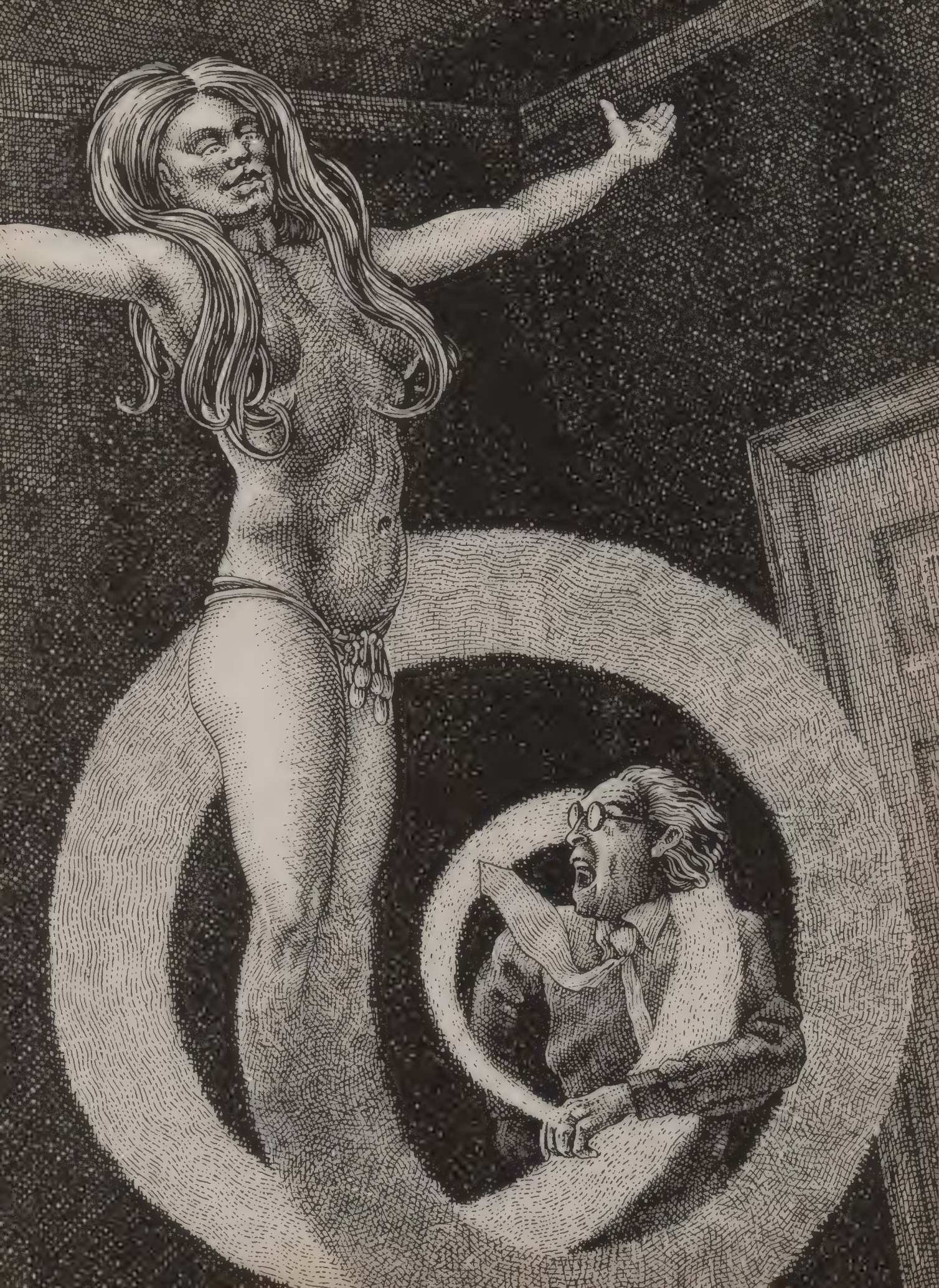
Once, twice, thrice the ring twists round a man's finger, and I leap to my task with joy, for this will be the last time. I gather my fiery substance to me, withdraw from the ethereal realms, and re-form myself before the astonished eyes of this fortunate, fortunate man.

He is entirely unremarkable, gaping as they all do—because I stand so much taller than he, because I have beauty as far beyond that of human women as the words of the poets have beauty beyond the cackling of hens. Because I am a daughter of the Jinn, and I have appeared suddenly and out of nowhere to change his life forever. As he will change mine, when the final wish is fulfilled. For he is the one-thousand-and-first to turn the ring upon his hand since that mage (I spit upon him, I refuse to speak his name) bound me to the ruby ring with his evil spells.

My new beneficiary—I do not call him master, for I do not serve, but am bound to effect three wishes only at his command—sits down in his chair, clearly overwhelmed in the presence of a jinniyah. I am feeling benevolent, in light of my imminent liberation, and take pity on his merely human nature, shrinking to a height nearer his own.

I soften my fiery beauty to something more bearable for him, and with gentleness of voice to match, I assure him, "I did not mean to frighten you, O Fortunate One. You hold a magical ring, as you must now have deduced, and I, a daughter of the Jinn, am bound to that ring. It is my *qismet* to grant you three wishes. You are familiar with such stories, are you not?"

By Donna Farley
Illustration by Mahendra Singh



After a moment a whispered "Yes" escapes his lips. Such awe and dismay are not uncommon in the Fortunate Ones. In a man of the current Age it is still more to be expected, for among the children of dust belief in my kind has faded like a mirage. Indeed my race prefers it so, lest the mages arise again to capture and enslave once more those of us who have endured to the ends of our sentences and won freedom—as I am about to do now.

I am not impatient. We Jinn are long-lived by nature, and though I have lost many centuries to this accursed ring, I have many more before me. And so I study him, while through his round spectacles he studies me.

Unremarkable, as I first noted: somewhat short of middle age for a son of the dust, thin and tense-shouldered, his hair growing sparse above his furrowed brow. He will make safe wishes, simple wishes, well considered. No extravagances, I judge, for this man in the carefully pressed but inexpensive suit.

It is better so; the madmen, the jesters—their wishes are grandiose and entertaining, but usually there is a great deal to clean up after they have wished themselves into a corner. This man will take his time. I think he will make little notes and perhaps even charts on the computer across the room there, but when he is satisfied he will recount to me his wishes one after another: health, wealth, and happiness, in some conservative, pedestrian guise.

And I will grant them with good grace. The worn-out ring will dissolve into a pile of dust, and I will fly free once more. I smile encouragement, about to tell him there is no need to hurry his decision, but then I see his lips tremble, and I await his words.

"I—I wish—" he stammers, "that you would fall in love with me! Absolutely! Forever!"

For one terrible endless moment I perceive the full magnitude of my error. There is much, much more to this Fortunate One than meets the eye. This wish is the shrewdest and most audacious I have ever encountered. It is inspired—inspired by Shaitan!

My Jinn power rises to the wish, bathing him with a radiance that rebounds into my own dazzled eyes, and I know why they call it falling. How could I have thought him unremarkable? The mind that could conceive such a wish is a worthy consort to a jinniyah!

He is smiling hesitantly, unable to see the occult light that has effected the wish, and so I must tell him, "Your wish is granted, Fortunate One." The words squeak out of me. This is not like the fierce and hungry love of the Jinn. This is love such as human women know, that takes the breath away, and imparts a glowing idiocy. I ought to feel humiliated, but instead I am giddy with joy when he reaches gingerly for my hand.

"Well. My name's Andrew. What's yours?"

"I am called Sheeftah, Fortunate One—Andrew, I mean." I giggle. "But perhaps *I* should be called the Fortunate One." Our eyes are drawn together.

"No, no," he says, caressing my cheek, "Your own name is so pretty!"

Ah, the embrace of love that follows! We go at once to his bed, and I show him how a jinniyah makes love. He takes no harm from it, as I tenderly shield him from the full magnificence of my Jinn nature, but there are scorch marks on the sheets in the morning …

I kneel, still naked, on the bed beside him, watching him breathe lightly while the early sun glints in upon the smooth lock of hair falling across his forehead. As if he feels my loving gaze, his eyes flutter open, and he looks uncertainly at me.

I cannot keep the worry from my voice. "Were you not pleased with me, Andrew?"

"Of course! Who couldn't be?" he reassures me. With a smile he reaches out to draw me down for a kiss.

His words are a pleasure I have never known before, sweeter than nectar. After more kisses I say, "What do you wish for breakfast?"

He thrusts me suddenly from him, his mellow face hardening instantly into a stern mask. "Oh, no, you don't!"

I am startled at the sharp tone of his words. "Beloved! What have I done to anger you?"

He jumps out of bed and begins to dress, cursing. "You aren't going to trick me out of a wish that easily!"

I gasp. "Oh, no, Andrew my love, no! Not a wish! A gift! I only wanted to *give* you breakfast. Because I love you!"

He pauses, a sock in one hand, and regards me suspiciously. "Do you? You weren't just pretending?"

Tears begin to roll down my cheeks, the first tears I have shed for many a century, and splash steaming onto the floor. "I am in love with you, Andrew! Absolutely, forever! That was your wish—I cannot *pretend* to grant a wish!"

"Oh," he says. "I—I'm sorry." I sit there in my humiliation until he pats me awkwardly on the back. "Please don't cry. I didn't mean—I, well, I didn't understand. Come on, it's all right. Look, let's have some breakfast."

I wipe away my tears. At first he wants only toast and coffee, from his own kitchen, but he allows me to persuade him to accept something grander. I provide a selection of fresh fruits and breadstuffs, noting his favorites for future breakfasts. A silver serving tray, fresh irises, the morning paper and, for a special touch, I cause matching robes of red silk to appear about our shoulders.

Andrew glances quizzically at his, then eats a few bites of croissant before sampling the coffee. "It's wonderful. Thank you," he says, and with a peck on my cheek he turns his attention to the newspaper.

After three more sips of coffee, he feels my rapt attention upon him and peers uneasily over the top of the paper at me. "Aren't you eating?"

"The Jinn have no need of your human food," I say, smiling, enjoying the sight of his clever bright eyes behind the spectacles.

He puts the paper down. "But you could if you wanted? Here," he says, and pops a grape in my mouth.

Such a happy morning! But then, he rises to dress in a hurry, saying he must rush off to work.

"But you need never work again, Beloved!" I cling to him as he packs his briefcase at the door. I hate the panic I feel within as I sense him drawing away.

"Don't let's be hasty," he says, and kisses me farewell.

What can he mean by "hasty," I wonder, standing in the silent living room when he has left. Almost at once upon seeing me, he made a momentous, unheard-of wish. Why should a man with a jinniyah at his beck and call think it hasty to quit his employment?

But my Andrew is not like other men. A man who can win the heart of a jinniyah perhaps has none of the greed and stupidity that so often make fools of the so-called Fortunate Ones who obtain wishes.

I gaze about the living room, for which I spared no glance while in the throes of my newfound love last night. Shelf upon shelf of books wrap the room in a scholarly air, and beside the computer lies a pile of mail, the envelopes neatly slit open, addressed to *Dr. Andrew Clarke, Arundell University Dept. of Middle Eastern Studies.* Ah, had I only looked at the room and not the man, I would have seen evidence of the mind that could conceive a wish of such brilliance! And I understand why he is in no hurry to cease working, for his work is done not for gain, but for the sheer love of learning.

Although the books are not confined to his academic specialty, Oriental antiquities do predominate. My lover reads Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Persian, among others, and indeed whole shelves are devoted to various incarnations of *The One Thousand Nights and a Night* alone. Oh, yes, my Beloved has heard tales of "genies" and wishes before—he only never believed them until he saw me!

And the ring. He could not have come upon it by chance entirely—I imagine he found it in some antique shop and recognized its country and period of origin, and knew he must have it, for his love of things from the East. And so I picture how he must have sat slowly twisting it upon his finger as he read from the book now lying open on the coffee table, a volume of Burton's classic translation of the *Nights.*

And as he twisted the ring, was he dreaming of someone like me?

Or only of the cleverest way to use wishes?

Oh, what a dagger in the heart is this love!

When he comes home again, I present him with a sumptuous meal and ask after his day. In happy domesticity I listen to him grumble about dull faculty meetings and slothful undergraduates. Halfway through the lamb and couscous he suddenly says, "There ought to be wine with a meal like this."

With a twinge of discomfort I produce a fine bottle. He does not notice the twinge. My family are of course among the good Jinn, those who made submission to the teachings of the Prophet many centuries ago. I, like others of my kind, find some impracticalities in our adherence to our religion; for a being who dwells mostly in another dimension of space/time, it is rather complicated to pray toward Mecca five times a day. Nevertheless, alcohol does carry a certain repellent quality for us. It pains me that my love partakes, though it should perhaps pain me more that he is an infidel. And yet it does not make me love him less, charmed as I am by the inevitability of my own Jinn power in answer to his wish.

Even when I refuse the offer to share the drink he does not evidence any guilt for displeasing me. "Of course, you're Muslim," he realizes. Then he laughs. "What a relief to find you're one of the good genies!"

I think, *If I were not one of the good Jinn, I would have burned you to death in your bed last night, despite my being absolutely in love with you.* And I am glad to be one of the good Jinn, for what misery would I suffer if I destroyed my own beloved? "You know all about us," I say with a smile, nodding at the Burton volume on the coffee table.

"Not all," he says, and sets down his goblet and feeds me a grape as he did at breakfast. "You must be able to tell more stories than even Burton translated."

I laugh. "Oh, yes. I met him once, you know. I liked him and his wife ... though he was not a very good Muslim," I add with a wry smile. The great explorer and scholar was devoted to his own peculiar brand of mystical Islam for much of his life, but he was also much devoted to the bottle.

Andrew stares at me in astonishment. "You *met* Sir Richard Francis Burton?"

"Certainly. It was before he was knighted, though—while he was the British consul at Damascus in 1869, as you measure the years. The man who held the ring at that time wished to get ahead in society, and I obligingly accompanied him, in the character of his proper Victorian sister, to a diplomatic reception."

"That's marvelous! Oh, I w—I wonder what he was really like."

I pretend not to notice the slip. My poor love, how am I to teach him to trust me? To make him believe that whatever frivolity he might waste his second and third wishes upon, I am bound to him forever by love, and willing to give him, as Hans Christian Andersen writes, the whole world and a new pair of skates?

"Tell me the whole story!" says Andrew, settling back with his goblet and some figs. He laughs, "You can be my Scheherazade!"

I laugh with him, but this, too, hurts. Scheherazade's audience, the Sultan, was a man who married and then beheaded the brides who displeased him. I do not like Andrew to be cast in the role of such a character, nor myself to play the woman who wishes to win such a man.

But surely this is far from the reality of our love. I tell the story of my visit to the Burtons, making sure to emphasize the love of Burton and his wife Isabel, which in my view even surpassed that of Barrett and Browning for romanticism. Like my beloved and myself, the Burtons were unmatched in religion; yet they made for themselves a marriage that was rich in all things—all except children, sadly. Well, it seemed not to make them sad, but it would make me sad.

"Isabel took us out to see her menagerie," I told Andrew. "She was trying, you see, to create the Peaceable Kingdom in her own garden, training wild creatures to live in harmony together. The panther was so tame, it would eat from your hand. But only a moment after Isabel permitted me to feed it a morsel from our dinner, the panther chased after the goats—what a ruckus!—and one of them fell into the river and drowned. I heard afterward that the panther ate Isabel's pet lamb as well."

He is watching me—is that suspicion in his eyes? What have I said?

He clears his throat. "Well. It's getting late—"

And we go to bed. I suggest some instruction from the *Kama Sutra*, since my Andrew is so fond of Burton, who translated the love manual as well as the *Nights* and so many other works. But he demurs.

"No, no, we don't need that," he says with a nervous laugh. "You're a natural, sweetheart!"

True. So I please him well, and tire him mightily in the process.

This night becomes the pattern of our life for some weeks, but the subsequent stories I tell are those of the Fortunate Ones whose wishes I have granted. He decides to record them as I tell them, and each morning, before leaving for the university, he transcribes the previous night's tale to his computer, refusing my offer to take on this task. They are not all wonderful stories, for few of the Fortunate Ones ever approach a tenth of the intelligence of my Beloved, and they waste their wishes in greed and pettiness. Sometimes they live to enjoy some measure of their wishes, sometimes they create a tragedy for themselves.

And the more stories I tell, the more he drinks. Why? When I can do anything he asks, to make him happy?

But my Andrew never asks anything of me except the tales. He thanks me for the meals, and compliments me on my beauty, but never asks anything I do not offer first.

And never once does he say he loves me, or pronounce my name. My lovestruck heart cannot bear at first for me to think what dreadful implications may lie in these facts. But at last I admit to myself that he seems to be growing reluctant to make love with me, and that something like regret shrouds his face in the mornings. My heart is about to break and at last I know I must do something—something drastic.

And when I decide what I will do, I am pleased with myself, and hope fills my heart. Still, I am nervous when he returns home.

"I am not going to tell any more stories," I announce at dinner. "And I am not going to serve you any more wine!" My heart pounds like a human woman's, fearful of losing his love. But I have been brutally honest with myself today: After a month together, there is yet no evidence that I have his love, so how can I lose it? My own enamorment with him is diminished not one whit by this knowledge. *Absolutely* in love and *forever* were the terms of the wish. And therein lies the spur to my actions. "I love you, Andrew. I will not be what your human psychologists call an enabler!" I place a hand on his arm, and soften my voice. "I love you, and can only do what is best for you."

For a moment he seems angry, and then he shrugs. "I can get alcohol myself if I want it. And your stories aren't as good as I hoped."

This is so unkind that the steaming tears begin in my eyes, as they did that first morning after when he thought I was trying to trick him.

"Oh, no, please don't! I didn't mean it that way." He holds out his napkin, averting his eyes. I take it, but the tears and sniffling will not stop.

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Oh, what a dagger in the heart is this love!

Sometimes change is rapid sometimes exceedingly slow

BETWEEN THE RIVER & THE ROAD

When the two streams meet you need to watch for the undertow.

"These aren't Opal Fruits," said Ian. "I asked for Opal Fruits."

"They're Starburst. Bursts. That's what Opal Fruits are called these days."

Ian looked dubiously at the packet. "Why?"

"Because the parent company decided they wanted them to have the same name all over the planet. I don't know. It doesn't matter, they're still Opal Fruits."

Ian looked at the packet for a long moment and pushed it away. "I wanted Opal Fruits."

"They *are* Opal Fruits."

"No, they're Starbursts. That's a stupid dickish name for them and I'm not having them."

I was inclined to agree with him—Starburst *is* a stupid name—but I'd paid for them and if he didn't accept them, I wouldn't get what he owed. "Opal Fruits wasn't such a hot name either."

By Jonathan L. Howard
Illustration by Chuck Demorat

"They were opalescent and they were fruity. Good enough. A starburst, in contrast, is a vernacular term for a nova or a supernova, an event involving giga or tera or gigatera- joules of energy, pumping out hard gamma radiation in all directions. I don't care to have one in my mouth. Furthermore," (there was always a *furthermore*) "it screws up the song." He started to sing a dead advertising jingle. "Opal Fruits, made to make your mouth water, fresh with the tang of citrus, four juicy fruit flavours." He stopped. "It doesn't scan if you say *Starburst* and only an idiot would think a nova in your gob would make your mouth water. It's cultural colonialism. Remember Marathon bars." It wasn't a question; it was an imperative like *Remember the Alamo*. "Those bastards changed the name to Snickers. What kind of half-wit name is Snickers? *This* is snickers." He raised his hands in a rodent sort of way, stuck out his front teeth, and made an idiot giggling noise. "That's snickering. What are they trying to say? 'Eat our chocolate bar and you, too, can sound like a rat boxed out of its face on crack'? Now Marathon, you could understand that. Energy. A bar that offers lasting satisfaction. *Snickers*. It's a bastard insult. Welcome to the 51st state." He paused, his face like thunder. I just knew the Swiss were going to come up in a minute. "And as for the bastard Swiss, Nestlé can just take a flying …"

"I saw an odd thing the other day," I interrupted, putting the Opal Fruits, the Starbursts, in my jacket pocket.

"What sort of odd thing?"

"Fancy going for a walk?"

"No."

"I'll show you the odd thing."

Ian sighed, looked at his watch, the middle distance, the heavens above, made a decision, and stood up.

We walked alongside the river Ouse. There's three in the country and this one's not the biggest. It's pronounced "Ooze" for your information and to save you the embarrassment of trying to pronounce it "Oo-ouse" or "Oos" or one of the other variants tried by visitors to the city who can't quite believe that there's a river called the Ouse. Lancaster's on the Lune (pronounced "Loon"). Maybe it's a county capital thing.

Everybody and their uncle and their uncle's dog has been up the Ouse at some point; Romans, Vikings, Saxons, Normans, Royalists, Parliamentarians. They've come, they've seen, they've said, "That'll do nicely." The Romans built a garrison that turned into a city they called Eboracum. The Vikings called it Jorvik because, well, because Vikings are like that. The Normans turned up and called it a very nice bit of real estate, ended up building a big church that eventually turned into a cathedral, the biggest Gothic cathedral in Northern Europe.

It's just struck me this is starting to sound like a general knowledge question, "What city is this?" It's York. So now you know.

One thing you never really get the hang of with York is the absolutely obscene amount of history it has concentrated into such a small area. Two Roman emperors died here and another received his laurels. Here's where the heads of the Royalist commanders decorated the gateway at the end of Micklegate after the Civil War siege, there's where 150 Jews committed suicide when trapped by a bloodthirsty mob in the 12th century, over there's where the highwayman Dick Turpin is buried. St. George's Field to the south of the city used to be owned by the Knights Templar. Most of the main streets within the city walls have been there for at least 1,400 years. Believe me, it's impossible to live in York for any length of time without developing a sense of history unless you're a complete thickhead.

The only historically comparable city in Britain would be, at a guess, London, and London has always had a habit of demolishing its history. Too much money, not enough foresight. York, in comparison, had a real fallow period in the Middle Ages and, as a result, hung onto a *lot* of old stuff. Thank Christ the Victorians didn't knock it down. They wanted to, mind, but that's another story. The point I'm trying to put over is that York *feels* old. Your sensibilities change. I've lived all over the place but nowhere has ever felt like York. Newcastle Upon Tyne has a chip on its shoulder, Manchester seemed to me never to regain its heart after the Provisional IRA blew it out for no apparent reason, and London … well, London seems to be an extended business district with bits of Morecambe teleported in at random.

So, we walked down until we were on the bicycle path that runs alongside the Ouse and headed upstream. I wish I could say we talked of weighty matters but I absent-mindedly offered Ian a Starburst early on and got his rant about Nestlé in its entirety. We walked along as the path left the river and across open fields. It was the middle of the afternoon and the weather wasn't as nice as it might have been; a bitter wind speckled with a fine drizzle, almost fine enough to be mist if there was enough of it. It wasn't salubrious and Ian started grumbling just before we got to what I wanted to show him.

"Look at that," I said and pointed.

He looked for a long moment and said, "So?"

It was a church, a little old one. Admittedly, York is heaving with churches, large and small, and most of them are more eye-catching than the one I'd pointed out. I'm not much on architecture, so I can't describe it down to every fenneled cresset and flying buttress (it had none of the latter and, as I don't actually know what a fenneled cresset is, or even if I've got the name completely wrong, I can't tell you if it had any of the former). It looked basically Norman with a square tower: It had that "We're Vikings with French accents and, by the cringe, we're going to stamp our mark on every inch of this country, Robin Hood or no" solid, faintly military air about it. No clock, no steeple, no big deal.

"So?" repeated Ian.

"Come on," I said, being wilfully enigmatic and carried on along the path.

Ian paused to look at the church a bit longer and then hurried to catch up with me. "That's it?" he asked. "We've come all this way in this bloody horrible wind to see a church?"

"Do you think you'd recognize it again?"

He stopped and looked back. "I think so. Blocky, tower, no clock. Yeah, I suppose so."

"Good. Come on."

He ran to catch up with me. "There's another one, isn't there?" he guessed, thinking ahead. "That's what the odd thing is, isn't it? One will be St. Pauls and the other one will be St. Peters and they'll be a hundred yards apart and look the spit of one another."

It was a good guess but wrong. "You'll see," I said and kept walking. After maybe another two or three hundred meters we reached a point where another path broke off at right angles to the cycle path and I walked down there, toward the main artery out of town in that direction, the A19. We passed some allotments, went over a cattle grid and a couple of stiles, and finally reached the road. I turned right, heading back into town. We didn't talk much for several minutes as Ian looked around for the church's twin. After we'd walked for five minutes, his patience ran out.

"So where is it?"

He meant the twin, but I misunderstood him for a moment. "Exactly!"

"What? No, where's the other church?"

I saw I'd jumped the gun a bit and back-peddled. "Never mind that, there isn't a twin."

Ian sagged his shoulders in exasperation. "Then what's this 'odd thing' you've dragged me out for? We could have been in the Grey Mare supping beer and hoping to Christ that six-year-old girl wasn't going to put *Wannabe* on the jukebox for the fifth consecutive time."

"What *haven't* you seen?"

"I haven't seen the bloody point of leaving a warm pub."

"The church?"

He stopped, made as if to say something, paused in mid-inhalation, thought for a moment, and then said, "Christ on a bike. We haven't seen the church again." He turned and started walking back up the road, looking steadfastly in the direction of the river. Five minutes later we stopped and he said, "Christ on a bike" again.

"But we *must* be able to see it. We can't be that far from it. How can you lose a church?"

I shrugged. "It's an illusion, it must be. There must be more land between us and the path than there seems. Maybe there's a bend in the path that joins the cycle path to the road." I subtended angles in the air with my hands. "You don't notice it, but it means you're not moving parallel to the path when you come back down the road. They're diverging."

"Right then," said Ian, "we're not going back until we've found the bloody thing." He looked up and down the road, gauging distances. We could see the allotments that the second path had passed, so it only took a moment for us both to arrive at the conclusion that a nearby leafy snicket running down between two houses was probably a good way to go.

It had taken maybe two minutes to walk along the allotment path, so there was no good reason that it took over three to walk the length of the snicket. We came out by a brick wall near the top of one of the earthworks that protects the town from the Ouse and its frequent floods. There was no sign of the church all along the route; only a couple of big back gardens on our right and a plot of wooded common land on our left. We stood on the top of the earthwork looking out across the Vale in the direction of the sugar refinery.

"We must have turned off too early," he said. "We'll go back and try the next one down." We turned and found the church right behind us.

Ian swore solidly for maybe 20 seconds. It wasn't fluent at all, just the same word repeated again and again. I couldn't say a thing. There was absolutely *no* way we could have missed seeing the church coming up the snicket. Somehow we had. There it stood, large as life and twice as grim.

Short autobiographical note: When I was a kid, we went for a day trip to Belle Vue in Manchester back in the 'seventies when there was still an amusement park there. There was a spook show kind of thing that consisted of a large dark room with tableaux that lit up and animated in sequence while a tape narrated the horrors on view. I was standing there by myself (it was a slow day) in this place while these things came to life around me and my knees went weak. I thought at the time that somehow they were electrifying the air (I was about eight. You'll make up any kind of crap and then believe it when you're eight). Years later I belatedly realized I'd been scared. My legs had done the proverbial thing and turned to water.

Standing on that earthwork with Ian, looking at a church that had no right to be there, my legs felt oddly weak and, Belle Vue temporarily forgotten, I put it down to the walking.

"Right," said Ian and walked toward the wall surrounding the church graveyard.

"What are you doing?" I said, knowing full well.

He didn't say anything more, he was already at the wall, searching out foot- and handholds.

"Don't be daft. We'll go around the front way," I said. I was starting to remember where I'd felt the weak knees thing before and what it meant.

"Front way," grunted Ian as he got a grip on the top of the wall and hauled himself up. "Fine," he said from the top. He swung his legs over and sat there looking past his shoulder back down at me. "You find the front way and we'll ..." He grunted once as he was pulled down off the wall into the graveyard.

I knew he was pulled, I know that. His head snapped around to look down and in front of him and he looked surprised and he may have looked scared, it was over so quickly. He didn't fall, I know that much. He went down at an angle and accelerated out of view way too quickly for gravity to be doing the pulling. He didn't make a sound then or afterward.

I'm crap at climbing, always have been; can't find the footholds and the handholds. I look at a mountain and think how to go around it, not up it, so I never considered for a second trying to scale the eight-foot wall. Instead, I did what I said I'd do. I looked for the front way. I went back down the snicket, no, I *ran* back down the snicket, the graveyard wall on my right turning into a short length of high, dense bushes and then an old brick wall. As I ran, an image and a song leapt up from my memory; Benny Hill in a sombrero singing something along the lines of "Why do graveyards have high walls? It is strange beyond a doubt. 'Cos the people outside don't want to get in and the people inside can't get out!"

Then I was out onto the road and legging it down to the next access, which was a proper road leading into a residential close. There was no footpath out of the bell of the close so I backtracked to a side road that bent sharply back toward the river. I ran all the way and there it was, the church.

Except ... except it had a steeple and was probably Victorian, Georgian at a push. Abandoned, boarded up, a sign saying it was going to be turned into "prestigious offices." I ran past it and there was no graveyard, not even a wall, just a row of bushes. A bunch of teenagers pissed on alcopops were sitting by the side of the church—more of a chapel really—they watched me run by, laughing at the loony. I ran to the hedges, forced my way through them. On the other side was the earthwork and, beyond that, the cycle path with a family going by on their matching Raleighs; father, mother, two daughters, all wearing helmets. To the right was the end of the snicket and beyond that was a couple of big back gardens. I'd lost the church.

So I did what anybody outside of a Hardy Boys' novel would have done—I ran around like a wet chicken, wild-eyed and gasping. Back and forth, three, four, five times. Finally, I even freaked out the teen drunks (our hope for the future, bless 'em) and they left, trying to give the impression that I'd somehow spoiled the ambience as opposed to scaring them.

It was all pointless, like when you lose something valuable and you retrace your steps but there's no sign and you have the bad feeling that somebody's had it away on their toes when they saw whatever it was on the pavement instead of being a good citizen and handing it in. I had an awful sick feeling that somebody had made off with Ian somehow and there was no way he was going to be turning up at the "Lost and Found" office anytime soon. I sat down and put my head between my knees and tried to tell myself it was all some sort of daydream; I was up to the stage where temporary insanity was preferable to this all being reality. I sort of managed it, too, talked myself into believing it was all some sort of odd stunt by Ian or I'd honestly lost one church and fixated on another. Then I

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By Eric Baker

Enter the game worlds of heroes, orcs, dragons, dukes ... and guns.

Kingdom Under Fire by Korean developer Phantagram is both a real-time strategy game and a role-playing game wrapped into one. It is set in the Fantasy kingdom of Bersiah. A war fought a hundred years before by forces of good, led by the Knights of Xok against the forces of evil, resulted in an age of peace and abundance. Predictably, the game is not concerned with peace and abundance. What it does chronicle is the second war that is just starting as the players sit down to the game. Bersiah's humans are fighting over who will take the throne of Azillia, the humans' greatest nation, while orcs are attacking human towns. At the same time, a creature named Rick Blood appears with his Dark Legion and invades the land.

Players can take either side in this war and each has lots of units available. Both the good and the evil campaigns have 13 missions. For each, ten are real-time strategy-based and three are role-playing-based. The campaigns overlap; several missions of each take place in the same locations at the same time, and both campaigns come together at the end of the game.

In the RTS missions, players direct workers to gather different resources and build castles, homes, units, etc. Resources can also be allocated to training units and researching upgrades in technology and weapons. Once they have their base set, players then direct their units into battle against the other army's forces. The good guys use humans, dwarfs, and elves while evil has orcs, ogres, undead, and other creatures. In function, the two sides are equal, each with its infantry, archery, flying, and spellcasting units. And, of course, both sides have their most important units, the hero characters.

The heroes are important in a couple of ways. Most critical of all, if they die, the mission is a failure and the player has to start again. There is no in-game save function, so heroes are to be kept alive at all costs. Heroes also go on the RPG-style missions. On these, the players control the heroes through a dungeon crawl, where the heroes earn experience points that help raise their levels. The heroes also find various magic items that increase their statistics and make them that much more deadly when it is time to play in RTS mode again.

While the heroes have the extra RPG missions to earn experience points and gain levels, all the units in the game earn experience for winning battles, becoming more powerful in the process. The problem for nonhero units is that they seldom last long enough to gain much experience. *KUF* is a brutal game, particularly on infantry. And it gets worse as the game advances. The heroes get better and better, while the other units mostly die before they can get very good. Eventually, by the later missions, single heroes, particularly if supported by archers and definitely if they have spell-caster backing them up, will cut great swaths through the enemy armies. Only flying units really remain to be feared, and that is true in all parts of the game.

Upon getting the game, players should immediately download the patch. It improves the computer AI which is fantastically important because the computer runs units for both sides. In RTS mode, the player directs the units to specific spots or targets, but it is still the computer that actually moves them there. And the computer tends to get confused by the terrain and has trouble moving units around others on their own side. Even more so than most RTS games, it is necessary for the player to keep moving constantly around the map in *KUF* to make sure that no unit is standing around doing nothing when it should be carrying wood or killing orcs.

Graphically, the best part of *KUF* is the flying units, with dragons getting top marks. The human buildings are interesting miniatures, and the Dark Legion structures rock. The sound is adequate, but players will probably turn it off before too long. When they select a unit to give it an order, they always use the same remark to acknowledge they're active. By the time play-

BELOW: Rules for the Naga are now on integral part of LotFR. *RIGHT: A brave band of adventurers faces the perils of the dungeons of Rappan Athuk.*

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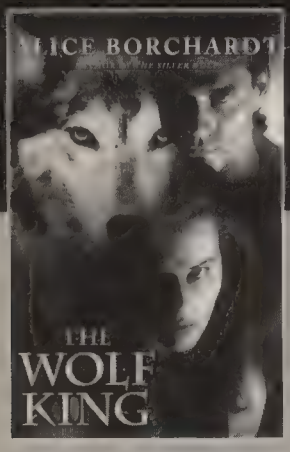

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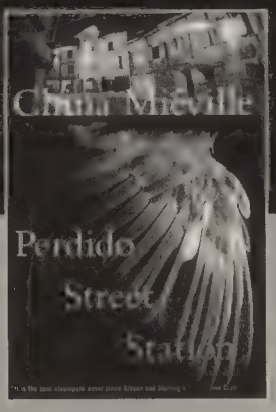

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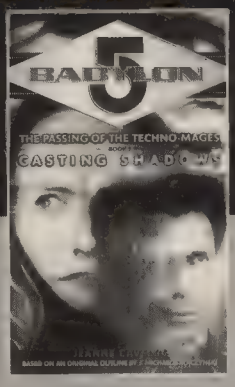

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ers are on the second mission, they'll have had enough of that. The shame of this is that the score is pretty good and even includes vocals, a rare thing in game music.

Kingdom Under Fire is not for the hardcore RTS or RPG player. There are better RTSs and RPGs on the market, and hardcore players don't like mixing genres. For the more casual

fans, *KUF*'s mix of genres may keep them from burning out on one type or the other.

When the first edition of *Legend of the Five Rings* was released in 1996, it won every major award the paper-and-dice roleplaying industry has to give. As *Dungeons & Dragons* is medieval European culture translated to a Fantasy world, so *LotFR* is medieval Japanese culture translated to a Fantasy world called Rokugan. In the basic campaign, players took the roles of Imperial magistrates. In practice they were troubleshooters with broad powers, but little support beyond each other. Chris Hepler, a screenwriter and Game Master whose best known RPG work was on *Paranoia*, posts brilliant long-form reviews at *www.tastes-likephoenix.com*. In his review of the first edition of *LotFR*, he described his first conversion experience to the game this way:

"Let me get this straight.You want me to play a fantasy RPG in which your characters bathe daily, are literate, polite to one another, and work in a team. You will be given a badge in the form of a pair of very sharp swords. Magic is considered a respectable, skilled profession among the upper classes, so five spellcasters in a group doesn't stretch plausibility. The warriors will be professionals with licenses to kill, but the second they overstep the bounds of their lord, they will be reined in, because the social order will be more powerful than any one man. There will be no mixing of incompatible characters such as thieves and ninja that inevitably lead to intra-party homicide.

"You want a system where you can kill or die in one sword stroke, so you actually have to think about the ramifications of a fight beforehand. You want to get away from the Conan fantasy in which you collect enough treasure to buy your own kingdom and having problems you can't solve with swords will not be reserved for 'high-level' characters.

"You want courtly love, moral dilemmas, and loyalty to your lord to play an inherent part of the game system. You will define the role of women among each of the clans, creating a stereotype intended to be broken. You will have a responsibility to those you guard both above and below you, and seven well-defined ideals that demand selfless acts of bravery. In other words, I as a GM will have a plausible reason why a mixed batch of armed psychos will get into trouble every week from now until eternity.

"Twist my frickin' arm."

Now the second edition of *LotFR* is out and while the core of a great game is still there, some things have changed.

Before it was a paper-and-dice RPG, *LotFR* was a collectible card game. The CCG's story line was called the "Clan War" and told the

tale of the Scorpion Clan's grab for the Emperor's throne and the war that ensued. The first edition of the RPG was set a few years before that story line and the back-story of the supplements was moving the world in the direction of the events as told in the "Clan War" story line. The second edition of *LotFR* is set with the "Clan War" under way. The Scorpions are broken and banished, the other clans are at one another's throats, the Emperor lies dying, and the Naga have awakened from their centuries-old sleep.

The system has changed as well: The largest change is in the dice mechanics. Before, players rolled to hit by rolling a number of dice equal to their skill plus the statistic that governed it, but they kept the results of only the number of dice equal to their statistic. Thus characters with a three strength and a four in swordsmanship would roll seven dice, but total only the highest three to see if they beat the target number. In the second edition, players now roll a number of dice equal only to their skill, and of those dice, they keep a number only equal to the governing statistic. Thus in this example, the player now rolls four dice, but still keeps the best three. The effect of this is that it is now harder not only to hit other characters in combat, but also to do anything else that requires a skill roll.

The reason for this is that the game is now shifting away from the court intrigue and the private morality plays that made up the action in the first five years of the game. Now the emphasis is on the war and on the higher-level characters who are directing it. The change makes *LotFR* more like other traditional Fantasy RPGs, but it also brings the RPG more into line with the content of the card game, which has more devotees.

The second edition also has a larger role for ronin, who were largely an afterthought in the first edition but are now a clan of their own, and the Naga, who are outside the collapsing social order of the human samurai.

An attempt to compile all that was added to the original game in five years of supplements is made in the second edition. It is not exhaustive, but all the spells and many of the powers and professions from the various clan books have been integrated.

As with any second edition, this one is a better buy for someone new to the game than it is for someone who already has five years invested in it. At the same time, this book is not a simple reprint of the first edition. It is a sweeping change that means less duplication for those longtime fans who do decide to buy it.

Not all fantasies are set long ago in imaginary worlds. Some of the best are set right here in the modern world. The paper-and-dice RPG *Unknown Armies* from Atlas Game is one such modern-day fantasy. The latest supplement for the game is *Hush Hush: The Sleepers Sourcebook*, and it is the same high-quality mix of postmodern magic and twisted imaginings that have made all the other books in this line so outstanding.

In the world of *UA*, magic and monsters are real, but they aren't common and they aren't world-shakingly powerful. Adepts, or Dukes as the slang calls them, are dangerous, often deranged people who can tap into the power of paradox to create effects that should be impossible. In the world of *UA*, however, a nonmagical human with a gun can be just as dangerous and just as deranged. A Duke with the ability to implant memories in people's minds is under no more obligation to use that power for selfish ends than is a gun owner, but the Duke's abuse would be harder to trace, harder to prove, and thus more tempting to employ.

So why don't they? Why isn't the world of *UA* dominated by those who can wield magic? One of the big reasons is the Sleepers. The Sleepers are a (supposedly) centuries-old cabal of Adepts who believe strongly that if

the public at large comes to accept that magic is real and that there are those who can work it, then witch hunts and lynchings and riots will surely follow. The masters of the Sleepers have no desire to be hunted as witches or torn apart by mobs, and they are willing to kill to ensure that the magic stays a secret.

Not that the Sleepers and their agents are so bloodthirsty that killing is their first option. As explained in the first chapter of *HH*, whenever the Sleepers become aware of an Adept who is using their power in a way that might expose everything, they send an agent or agents to warn the Duke to cool it. They only give one warning. After that, they kill the Duke and attempt to obliterate all evidence of the rogue's magic.

The first chapter details the who, what, when, and (particularly) why of the Sleepers. The why is important because roaming the world looking for dangerous and magical people to kill it isn't a normal job. Why would anyone do it? Why would player-characters? The answers are pretty good, and they fit perfectly into the tone of the game.

Chapter 2 is the goodies chapter. It details the safe houses, equipment, artifacts and tomes the Sleepers have accumulated over the years. It also discusses the favored weapons and tools in which the Sleepers train their agents. Chapter 3 is my favorite part. It includes the statted-up descriptions of 14 members of the Sleepers. They are just as varied and interesting as would be expected of people who have made hunting Adepts their life's work.

Chapter 4 contains the write-ups of 12 mini adventures. The most frequently asked question about *UA*, because it is such a nontraditional setting, is "What do I do in it?" *HH* and this chapter are yet another answer to that question. Like *LotFR* and its imperial magistrate campaign, being a Sleeper turns characters into roving troubleshooters. The mini adventures give the players 12 trouble spots to clean up first, but the sort of trouble that player characters make in a usual adventure is exactly the sort of thing the Sleepers are trying to stop. A single session of swapping "war stories" with other players can give Game Masters weeks' worth of ideas for Sleeper missions.

Unknown Armies is a great game and a terrific setting, and *HushHush* is probably its most accessible supplement yet. It is the basis for a campaign that is probably the closest to most players' previous role-playing experiences. At the same time, it is great for an existing *UA* campaign because it gives the Game Master a new set of antagonists—who draw the line on how far the characters can go to achieve their ends—to set against his players.

Speaking of killing things … the march of adventures for the *D20 System* by people who are not Wizards of the Coast rolls on. The latest is *Rappan Athuk The Dungeon of Graves: The Upper Levels* from White Wolf's Sword and Sorcery Studios. *RA* is a true retro adventure. It is a deliberate return to the dungeon-making of the 1970s when no one cared how a character's mother had treated him when he was a child. It is a return to the days when everyone cared even less about how all these monsters managed to live in the same dungeon, usually right next door to one another, without anything to eat except wandering adventurers. An exercise in "roll playing," *RA* is a dungeon crawl in the pejorative sense of the phrase, and yet is proud of its limited scope and bloodthirsty agenda.

The dungeon-crawl genre has been pretty much taken over by the video game market, but there are reasons for playing paper-and-dice versions. The most compelling is that a live Dungeon Master allows players to be far more creative than they can ever be by simply clicking a mouse on a computer. Any player who has ever beaten an invisible monster with a bucket of muck or foiled a trap with a simple stone ball knows exactly why it is better to have a real person in charge of the show. And frustrating as fellow players can be, they are seldom as exasperating as the computer-guided ones in most computer RPGs.

Taken on its own terms, *RA* is entertaining. It is so large and contains so many experience points on the hoof that characters who start the dungeon's first level as third-level characters will be up to seventh by the time they make it to the third level of the dungeon. Along the way they will face such classic beasts as carrion crawlers and gelatinous cubes, tons of undead nasties, and some new critters and traps just for this adventure. It is good way to get back to the origins of roll-playing.

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books

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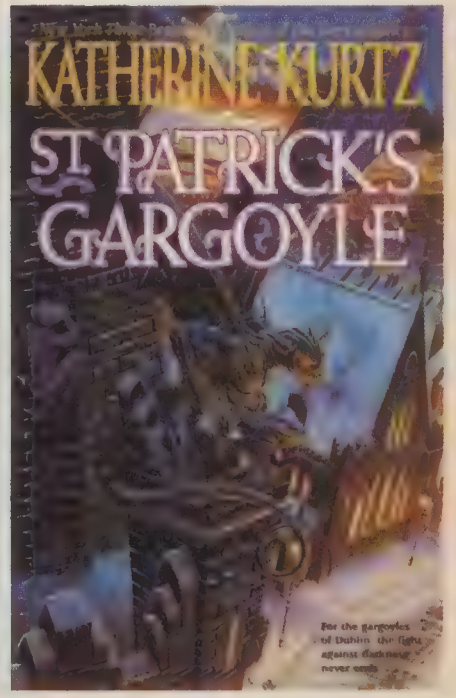

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Can I say that ***St. Patrick's Gargoyle*** *(by Katherine Kurtz; Ace Books, NY; hardcover; 233 pp.; $21.95)* would make the perfect Disney movie without sounding either

condescending or demeaning, but just accurate? (And I don't have in mind a cartoon either, but a jaunty little live-action film.) Disney provides quality product nowadays, with a moderate amount of irony and self-reflexiveness. The studio's slump when it seemed capable only of treacly pap is long in the past. Nonetheless, anything that comes from Disney still embraces certain hallmarks, hews to a certain worldview, bears an intangible aura of Uncle Walt's Pollyanna-ish outlook on life. That Kurtz here seems to have embraced and replicated the Disney *weltanschauung* might be an accidental or calculating move. But the Hollywood plotting, the reader-friendly Fantasy elements, the sentimental tugging, the comic tone, and the very characters all seem cinematically derivative, and I couldn't resist mentally casting the whole story as I read it.

In Dublin, we immediately learn, many of the most famous buildings are guarded by living gargoyles, which are really an order of angels delegated to earthly duties by God Himself. (Kurtz has to get credit for employing—without too much stretching—hardcore Christian/Catholic theology throughout this book, not a common genre move. Although her treatment of Death as a separate entity, employing agents known as Death's Deputies, is hardly canonical.) Our point-of-view gargoyle is Paddy, the fellow assigned to St. Patrick's Cathedral. Paddy (computer-animated in the film version and voiced by Robin Williams or Nathan Lane) is a smart-alecky, gruff, somewhat irreverent fellow. On a mission to recover some stolen items from his cathedral. he encounters and enlists as assistant 82-year-old Francis Templeton (Sean Connery with suitable makeup, or Dick van Dyke), owner of the charming antique Rolls Royce named Phyllida. This nearly random association twixt creature of magic and man of the mundane soon leads to further adventures for the pair, culminating in Templeton's heroic sacrifice during an adventure involving dead Crusaders, demons, and the Head of Baphomet, a dire relic.

Supporting characters include Templeton's young godson Marcus (Hugh Grant), his hectoring daughter Aisling (Helen Hunt), and his dead wife Maeve (Katherine Hepburn in a rare return to the screen).

The local color (Kurtz lives in Ireland) is visually rich and interesting, though ladled on a tad too thick at times in tour-guide fashion. Some logical inconsistencies (at first, gargoyles are said to be free from their buildings for only 24 hours a month; when Kurtz realizes the narrative drawback of this, she makes exceptions without revising the original restriction) are skimmed over blithely, and the Topper-like ambience of happy spooks is mostly maintained, though the business about Maeve requesting Templeton's death so that he can keep her company in Heaven for Christmas is scarier perhaps than Kurtz ever intended.❧

Paul Di Filippo

between the river

Continued from page 73

went and spoiled it all by sticking my hands in my pockets and finding a half-finished packet of Opal Fruits, Starburst, whatever. I took it out and looked at it like I'd found a dead brown scorpion in there. The last one out of that packet had been a strawberry flavor, tempting enough to overcome Ian's jihad against the Mars Corporation. That tatty little packet had taken away any chance of denial; the thing had happened. A vanishing church had eaten my friend. I went home and tried very hard to forget about it.

I was doing quite well for about a fortnight before the police turned up investigating a missing persons report; Ian, naturally. They'd eventually missed him at work. They, the police that is, had asked around and discovered that the last time anybody had seen him had been in the pub, bickering with me. "What was that about?" asked the unsympathetic detective-sergeant in the interview room. Interview rooms are actually grimmer than the ones on TV.

I told him it was about cultural colonialism. The sergeant wanted details. I explained about Opal Fruits and he looked like he could have lived with less detail after all. I had some half-arsed tale I was going to tell him about Ian going off to become a hippie or a monk or something, but I forgot all the details even before he asked me where we'd gone after we left the pub so I told him, I told him the whole shebang. Everything. Starburst, church, ginnel, church, chapel, freak out.

When I'd finished, he looked at me for the longest time, slightly pityingly and I thought, that must be the look they give you just before they recommend you for psychiatric reports. Instead, he told the attending constable to leave, reached over to the tape recorder, stopped it, and pocketed the tape.

"You're free to go," he said, making to rise.

"What?" I said, less cleverly than I might have hoped.

"Your friend. He's gone. The rest of us might as well just get on with our lives."

The penny dropped. It fell about as quickly as if through treacle, but at least it fell. "This has happened before, hasn't it?" I said.

"Oh, yes. Lots of times. As far back as our records go. Most likely a lot further." Standing, he leaned over the table and glowered at me. "But you'd be advised to keep that little gem of information to yourself."

I was shocked, I was appalled. Actually, I was really relieved that, contrary to expectations, I wasn't mad after all. Still, I thought I should show a little outrage. "Why? Why have you kept it to yourself? People should be warned!"

"Don't be daft, lad," he replied. "'Beware the phantom church'? We'd be a laughing stock. And think of the tourists. All the decent ones'd stay well away. We'd just be awash with t'flaky bastards like them you see at Stonehenge. Bugger that for a game of marbles."

"But ..." I had to know, I really had to know, "do you know what happened to Ian? Do you know where he is?"

"No," he said bluntly. "He's gone. He's never coming back. My old sergeant when I was new to the job, he reckoned that place was a Templar church burned down by the Pope." He looked thoughtful and added, "Not personally, like. I don't think so, mind—wrong side of city for Templar stuff. I reckon it had summat to do with Vikings." I didn't mention the church had looked Norman and too late for Eric Bloodaxe and his mob to have been involved. "Point is, sunbeam, it dun't matter. It pops up once every few years and, if any bugger's daft enough to climb over the wall, it sods off with them. Law of nature around here."

I just looked at him and blinked a bit. The city's chockablock with ghost walks but being told a ghost story of sorts in a police interview room in Friargate by a career copper is something else again.

"It's the history, you see," he continued. "There's too much of the sodding stuff. The other cities have had clearouts of all their old buildings and shite and it gets rid of things like this. Never happened in York, though. The number of folk going home after doing a club who never make it, you'd piss your pants if you knew. There's Christ only knows what hanging around this place 'cause we never had a springclean like just about everywhere else." He shrugged. "Now, of course, it's too late. Every bloody thing's a grade-one listed building. You have to put in for permission in triplicate to the men from the ministry before you can fart in 'em, never mind changing anything. Nowt we can do, now. Just have to live with it." He checked his cup on the table for dregs and looked at me. "C'mon, you'd best be on your way home."

He was all set to leave me to it after steering me to the front door, but I stopped and said, "You're winding me up, aren't you?" A missing friend and a vanishing church said, no, he wasn't, but there's some things you just have to ask. "I know York's supposed to be the most haunted city in the most haunted country in the world and all that but, come on?"

He walked past me and looked up and down the street. Satisfied there was nobody in earshot he leaned toward me confidentially. I was sort of hoping he was going to tell me that of course he was making it all up, you daft sod. Instead, he said, "Word to the wise, sir. Any time the 17th of May is a full moon, I'd stay well away from Fossgate if I were you. Things happen there. Don't know why, don't care either." Then he was gone.

I looked up at the darkening sky. It wasn't May, it wasn't the 17th, it wasn't a full moon, and I was maybe half a mile from Fossgate. I still walked home very quickly and I didn't look back. ❧

in sorrow

Continued from page 59

to paint. Through the night, a curious mixture of faith, hope, and need drove his hands. He repeated in color and stroke the joys of her life, defying the stilled clock of the mantle, and as he worked, he dreamed comfort for the horrors of her last months. As daylight waxed and then waned, his hands moved more slowly; not from fatigue—for his body felt the invigoration of hunger—but of the epiphany that had filled Dora's last months. His hands, holding to life and death at once, remembered the movements of Dora's fingers as he sustained her. In the dream-state of fatigue and the fast, John Karl heard strange sounds from the house, sounds he imagined that he imagined; sounds that, in his mind, somehow echoed the fragmentation of Dora's soul into her salutary toles.

When at last he set the brushes aside, the sky outside lay indigo with the last traces of a second day. The chirruping of crickets had replaced the sounds of automobiles, lawnmowers, and playing children.

The tole looked back at him with eyes that might have been Dora's. Neither angel nor demon, it had a transcendence that John Karl could not credit to his own talent. His memory of the last night and day and night was blurred as though he had watched over someone else's shoulder, watched as the tole emerged from empty wood like a butterfly from a chrysalis: the wings of a bee, the platinum crown of a little girl's hair. But there were also scales and talons, quills and exposed bone. And yet the tole somehow lacked the horror of the others. It had an unfinished quality about it that made him want to take up the brushes again, to cover the imperfections, and yet he knew he could not add what had yet to be done.

When he opened the bedroom door, there were strange smells in the house: animal smells, feral and musky. Many of the toles were missing from the hearth. He found them, still and wooden, at the front and back doors, at the windows. He carefully gathered them into his arms, carried them into the back yard, and placed them in a circle, leaving a single space empty. Finally, he brought out the new tole, placed it in the center of the incomplete circle, then went to the lawn chair on the patio and sat down to wait.

His eyes were heavy with last night's absent sleep, and he jerked back to wakefulness each time his head nodded. In the darkness of the yard, the toles sat motionless.

Midnight—the witching hour—came and went. Still there was no change in the toles. What had he expected? They were just painted wood, after all. But when he went back inside, every time he meant to get ready for bed, he found himself instead at the kitchen window, drawn to the broken circle in the back yard.

Wrapped in an afghan from Dora's room, John Karl returned to the edge of the circle. The darkness somehow rendered the toles' features more lifelike, his imagination enlivening what darkness concealed. Like him, they seemed only to be waiting for some release.

Something moved in the dry leaves of the hedge. Any other night John Karl would've thought it a neighborhood cat, but not tonight. "The circle's broken," he said to the silence of the bushes. "You can't be free—she can't be free—if you don't come back."

He awoke suddenly, one hand cold and wet. A strand of saliva, shimmering blue-white, trailed from his lips to the back of his hand. He dried his hand against his pant leg and pulled the afghan tighter around himself.

In the yard, at the center of the circle, incandescence seemed to flow around the new tole. A trick of the moonlight?

At the edge of the yard, movement attracted John Karl's eye. From the darkness of the garden shrubs, a gangly, spider-like creature emerged, shambling toward the gap in the circle. The light of the center tole grew as it approached, reflecting in the multiple hues of its pebbled skin. The other toles seemed to move and stretch as if waking from a long sleep, but remained within the confines of the circle. With a strange and deliberate syncopation, their movement finally exceeded the possibility of a trick of the darkness. John Karl hardly dared breathe as they moved to the swell and ebb of pale luminescence. At last they moved as one in a strange and feral dance, each taking on its own faint light, linking them to one another and the tole in the center, their steps advancing to a climactic moment. Suddenly they grew still, a moment's contemplation, and then, without warning, broke the circle, scattering, with their fading light, like autumn leaves into the darkened corners of the yard.

Still the new tole remained, a radiance almost without form. John Karl let the afghan slip to his feet, pushed his cold and aching joints from the chair, and walked out to where it waited. There was a familiarity about the presence in the light. Not Dora. Not himself. But something in between; a daughter of hope, healed of the wounds he had painted into her flesh. She held his eyes as she slowly rose from the ground and drifted above him. Then, with only the faintest nod to him, she was gone, vanished through the trees, following the others, the horrors of Dora's illness, into the world. He stood in the darkness for a long time, the cold creeping into his aching joints. Like Dora, he knew they would never return.

Back in the shop, he sorted through the scraps of pine, oak, and mahogany, feeling the texture of each piece, tapping it with his knuckle and listening to the soundness of the grain. At last he chose a piece of ash, took it back to the kitchen, and set it on the counter where it could remain until he was ready for it. Then he went to the bedroom and crawled under the covers, and dreamed of a son. ❧

panther

Continued from page 69

He tries to explain. "It wasn't your telling—I'm sure Scheherazade herself couldn't do better. But they're all so much the same. I thought I could learn something new and exciting from them. But you know, even if they were more wonderful than Ali Baba or Aladdin, I would never be able to publish them."

I continue to cry. After a few minutes he says, "Sheeftah, I'm sorry." He gets up from the table and walks over to lean on one of the book shelves, sighing. "It was a stupid wish, wasn't it? I thought I was being so bloody clever."

"It was more than clever," I whisper. "It was—devastating."

"Let's talk," he says, and sits himself down in the armchair, motioning me to take the couch across the coffee table from him. I sit, still holding the napkin at the ready.

"You aren't really in love with me," he says.

"The food I provide for you, Andrew. You have eaten it, it has nourished you. You are not as thin and pale as when I first met you! Is that not real food?"

He shrugs helplessly. "I suppose so …"

"My love for you is of the same quality. Real."

An unscholarly expletive escapes him, and he lowers his head into his hands. Then he takes a deep breath and looks into my eyes. "I think I never really wanted *any* wishes."

"That cannot be. You made the one wish that could guarantee you the fulfillment of any and every wish you might ever conceive in the future. Beloved," I say, taking his hand, "you do not know what it is you want. Let me teach you how best to wish—"

With his free hand he caresses my cheek, and my heart leaps within me. Is there any chance he may begin to return my love? But it does not matter. My love for him is not conditional upon his for me, or upon anything else.

"No. I want to be a great scholar, make some exciting discoveries. But what good is it if I know I got it from a wish? Sheeftah, you're wonderful. But you shouldn't need someone like me to tell you that. You don't belong with a human man—"

"You know very well from your studies that matches between Jinn and humans are not unheard of," I counter.

He shakes his head. "But it wouldn't have happened to us without my wish. You have to know that, despite your feelings. Sheeftah, it isn't right. I'm going to wish you free—"

"Stop!" I cry. "Beloved, will you trust me to make your last two wishes for you? Because I love you absolutely and forever. And therefore I can only wish what is best for you."

He hesitates for some time. But at last he shakes his head. "I don't think that will do. I want to wish what will be best for both of us. Sheeftah, I didn't want to admit this to you but.… I think I'm in love with somebody else. And I think she's the right woman for me."

Never have I felt such a blow. And more terrible than terrible—his face. He pities me, he is ashamed to hurt me. And he is fearful, as when I told the story of Isabel Burton's menagerie. But in his mind now, who is the panther, and who the lamb?

And in mine? Oh, yes, I know what he fears. I cannot stop loving him. But oh, I can hate this pet lamb of his with all the terrible power of my fiery being!

"I'm sorry," he says. "It was an awful thing for me to do to you. You see, I'd had a terrible fight with her the night you appeared—I was feeling hurt, wanted solace, maybe wanted to make her jealous.... it's no excuse, I know.... and, and then I, well, we made up the fight, but I was already here with you every night.... God, I'm a rat," he finishes miserably.

"I see," I whisper at last. And I decide not to tell him.

"I wish," he said, "That you would go free. And I wish that neither you nor I will remember anything about our affair or about these wishes."

The City of the Jinn lies before me, its gleaming domes and minarets towering above the shimmering desert of the aether, and I soar toward it, free at last from my long servitude to the ring. I am greeted by my brothers and sisters, and we embrace and kiss with delight. Reclining on the lawn by the fountain of lights, we quaff divine nectar, and share stories of our various imprisonments. I am the last of our family to come in.

After a time I tire of socializing and take my leave to wander the gardens, reveling in the colors beyond the spectrum visible in the material world, the birdsong more subtle than a symphony, and a thousand perfumes of delight mingling in the air. How happy I am, home at last in my native country among my family!

The more happy because I know I will soon give birth to a son.

It does not puzzle me that I have no memory of the child's father, nor of the last three wishes upon the ring. Such are the ways of wishes bound by the spells of mages, and none of my immense Jinn power can undo them now, even if I desired it. And why should I desire it? I am happy, and about to be a mother.

I watch the peacocks displaying on the bank of the river, and the leopard lounging on a tree branch above. He yawns as I pass by, and for some reason I think of Isabel Burton, a human woman I met in Damascus a century ago. She had a menagerie, and was trying to teach the animals to live peaceably together, as they do here in the City of the Jinn, but alas, she had no magic such as we have, and her panther ate her pet lamb. A sad tale, and I shrug it off. I will think instead of a name for my son.

I will name him neither for a panther nor for a lamb. It will take some time to think of a name for him, but I will find it. A scholar's name, I think, will be right for him. ❧

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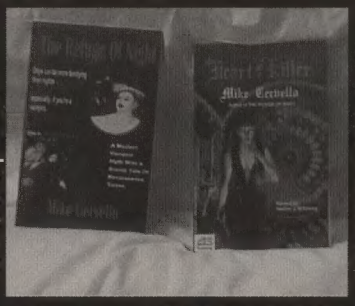

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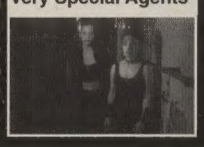

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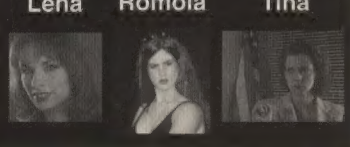

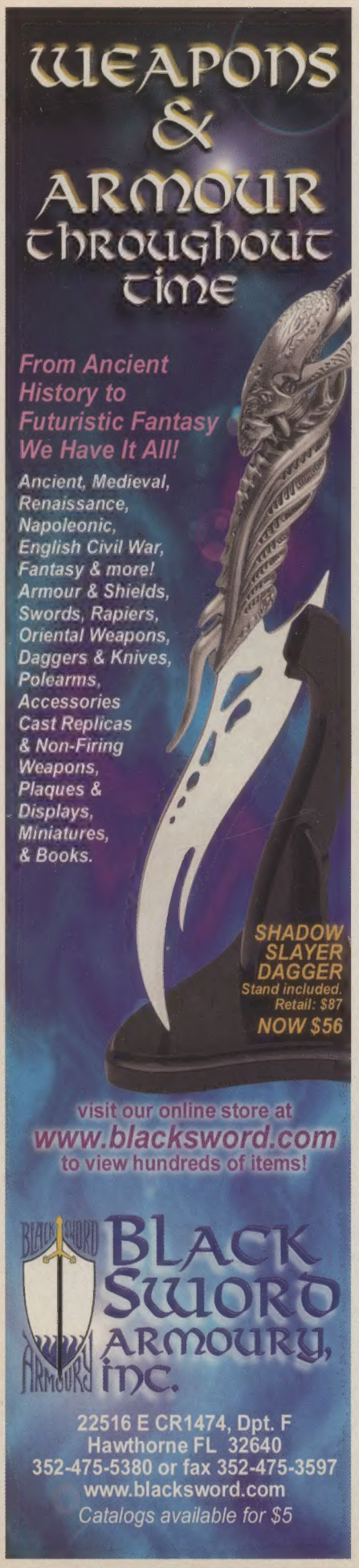
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KAGE BAKER was born in Hollywood, California in 1952. Her first story of the time-traveling Dr. Zeus Incorporated, *Noble Mold,* appeared in *Asimov's* in 1997 and has been followed by numerous others since. Her first novel of the Company, *In the Garden of Iden,* was published in 1997. Subsequent novels include *Sky Coyote, Mendoza in Hollywood,* and *The Graveyard Game.* She taught Elizabethan English for the stage with the Living History Centre for a number of years, and is currently a teacher and director for As You Like It Productions. She lives in Pismo Beach, California.

ERIC BAKER was born in Reno, Nevada but has lived in Fairfax, Virginia since 1970. He holds a degree in English from Virginia Tech and was a graduate of Clarion in 1989. Eric sold his first story in 1992, but it was his third sale that appeared in print first. His work has appeared in *Amazing, Fantasy & Science Fiction,* and *Science Fiction Age.* He also has written two modules for BRTC's *Timelords* game system.

DONNA FARLEY's SF and Fantasy stories have appeared in a number of anthologies and magazines, including *Catfantastic, Weird Tales,* and Canadian SF magazine *ON SPEC.* She is also a poet with an upcoming publication in *Mythic Delirium,* and contributes a quartely column to a women's religious journal. She is married to an Orthodox priest and is the mother of two teenagers. The closest she's ever been to a panther is the family cat, the only member of the family who doesn't write.

HEINZ INSU FENKL is the author of *Memoirs of My Ghost Brother,* an autobiographical novel about growing up as a biracial child in Korea in the 1960s. The son of a German-American soldier and a Korean black-marketeer, he was raised in Korea, Germany, and the U.S. Currently, he lives in New York with his wife, Annie B. Dalton, and their daughter.

This is **BRUCE GLASSCO**'s fifth story to appear in *Realms of Fantasy,* and the first one not to have a female protagonist. He has also had two stories appear in the Datlow/Windling anthologies *Black Swan, White Raven* and *Sirens and Other Daemon Lovers.* He teaches English and Creative Writing at Virginia's Eastern Shore Community College, on a tiny spit of land between the Chesapeake Bay and the ocean.

KAREN HABER is the author of eight novels. Her short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* and various anthologies. In her secret identity as an art journalist, she reviews art books for *Locus* and has profiled many of the top artists in the Sci Fi and Fantasy fields. She lives with her spouse, the writer Robert Silverberg, near San Francisco.

JONATHAN L. HOWARD—as distinct from just Jonathan Howard, who wrote a biography of Darwin—is a game designer and scriptwriter, having worked on the Broken Sword series of games, among others. He lives in York with his wife, daughter, and chinchilla. "Between the River and the Road" is his first published short story and, worringly enough, is based on an actual walk.

JOHN MONTELEONE has been a diverse and succesful illustrator for over 10 years. He has created realistic paintings for such clients as Time Warner, 20th Century Fox, and *Readers's Digest.* John's work was often featured on the cover of *Science Fiction Age.* He has been a professional kickboxer and is certified in Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing. He is currently teaching Science Fiction illustration at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

RICHARD PARKS, a frequent contributor to *Realms of Fantasy,* is currently writing a novel based on the characters in "The First Law of Power."

MAHENDRA SINGH was born in 1961 to a German mother and an Indian father. As a youth, he traveled extensively with his parents and was exposed to many cultures. His exotic culture is reflected in the humorous, erotic, and sometimes bizarre nature of his pen, ink, and conte pencil renderings.

FRANKLIN THATCHER is a software developer by vocation, a writer by avocation, and a bishop in the Mormon church by dedication. He has sold two stories to *Realms.* He appeared in Volume XV of *L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future,* Volumes I and II of *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds,* and *Talebones.* His nonfiction work includes planetarium shows produced at Hansen Planetarium in Salt Lake City. He lives in Orem, Utah, with his wife and many cats.

GAHAN WILSON's cartoons are known chiefly because of his affiliation with *Playboy* magazine, but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker, Weird Tales, Paris Match,* and the cover of *Newsweek.* Gahan is also a talented writer whose often-macabre fiction has appeared in *Omni* and the original *Dangerous Visions.* He created a CD-ROM entitled *Gahan Wilson's Ultimate Haunted House,* demonic baseball cards, and a telefilm for Showtime. He makes his home on Long Island.

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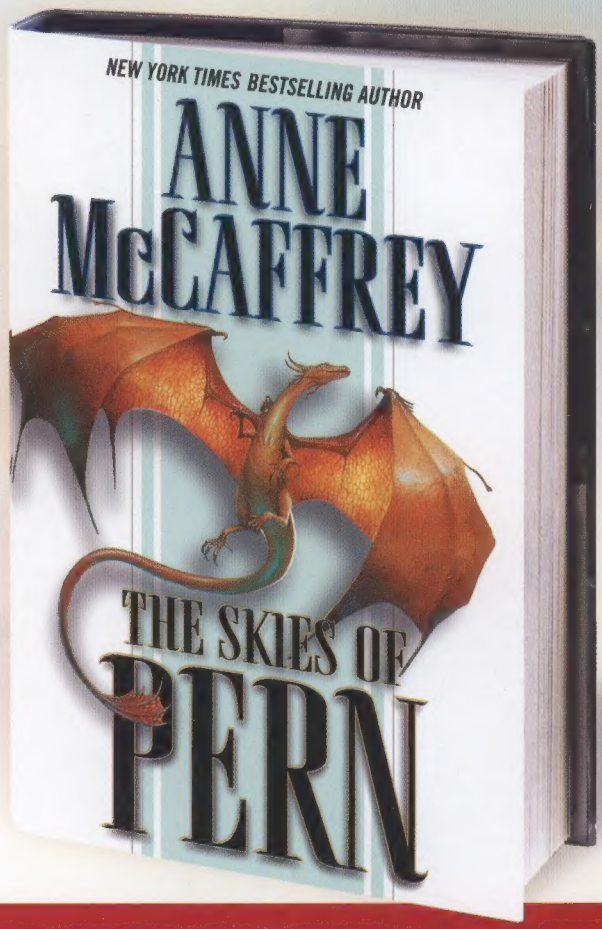

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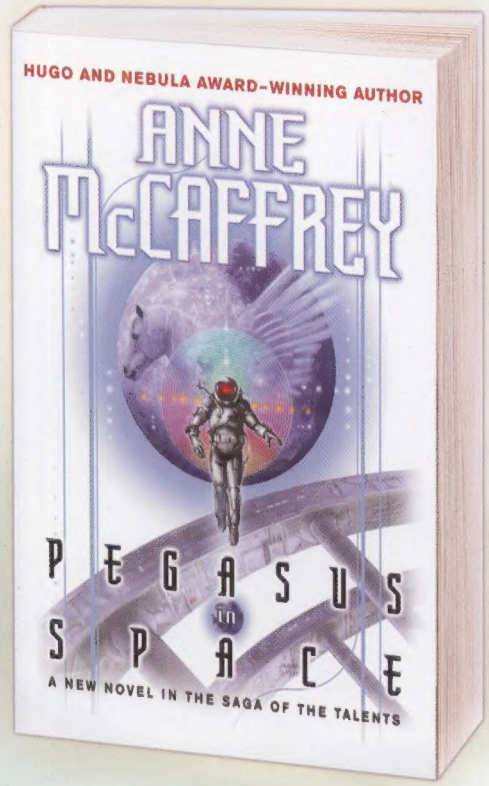

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